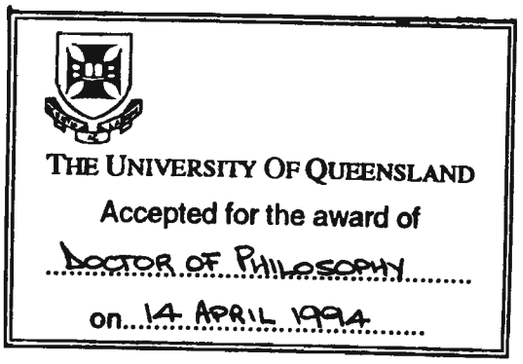

Plays by Women: Subjects for Nonproduction

The Erasure of Women Playwrights

Submitted By

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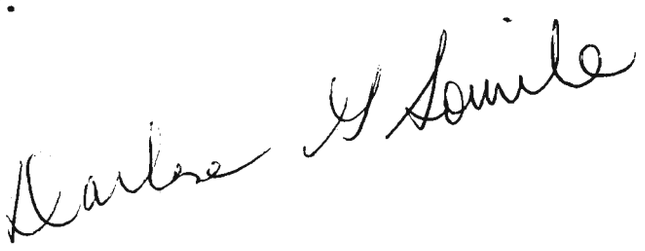
A thesis submitted in the Department of English, University of Queensland, Australia, for the degree of Doctorate of Philosophy

1993

DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I hereby declare that the work presented in this thesis is to the best of my knowledge and belief original, except as acknowledged in the text, and that the material has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, for the degree at this or any other university.



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank the Commonwealth Department of Education for a Commonwealth Government Postgraduate Research Award, which enabled me to undertake this work. I'd like to express my gratitude to the English Department for Tutorial Assistantships that provided economic assistance and valuable experience in teaching, as well as for the use of the facilities. Much appreciation to all the Staff for their friendship and assistance.

I would like to thank all the people who have acted as Supervisor for me, including Dr. Veronica Kelly, Dr. Jon Stratton, and last but not least, Dr. Carole Ferrier, who saw me through to the end.

A warm thank you to all the postgraduates who have given me so much encouragement, especially Chris Lee, Leigh Dale, Simon Ryan, and my departed compagnon, Nora Di Lizio. Warm thanks to Carmel Freya for her help as a sounding board during my revision process.

Thanks to my departed parents who taught me determination, I wish they could be here now. Finally, I want to thank my husband and children for all their support.

ABSTRACT

Women playwrights have been erased; and it is my thesis that erasure is one of the most powerful yet least visible tools of dominance in the intertextual field of discourse, since its product is manufactured absence--not just of difference, but of dialogue with a difference that demands an end to dominance. In this field of textuality where representation shapes our perception and belief systems, absence by its very nature is something one might not notice in the formation of dominant social paradigms. Yet erasure in representation reflects a way of thinking which leaves traces in language that we can detect and question. I feel it is important that we become fluent readers--not victims--of erasure, by studying its methodologies and philosophical structures, and the politics of those who use it, so that when we critique dominance we do not mimic it, nor embody it, but instead transform it by our very practice.

The work of tracing erasure has led me to ask questions about the structures of representation itself; how has it been controlled to produce the authority of tradition such that some subjects have been promoted while others are excluded; and what effect has this had in the construction and maintenance of "naturalised" ideologies (e.g. women don't write plays)? During the course of my investigation, I will argue that the absence of women playwrights and their plays from representation within the canon of great western drama is neither due to nonexistence nor to "bad" writing. Instead it can be traced to erasure, an historical process of what amounts to nonreception--sustained negative reception coupled with anthological exclusion--where prejudice and the power to support it has resulted in the exclusion of plays by women from the discursive formation of Knowledge, <u>even when</u> they meet publication standards, achieve public success, and manage to win a few distinguished awards. I will show that the nonreception of "women's plays" can be traced to gender biased critical practices derived from Aristotelian rules, logic and interpretations of "Nature" that have privileged

masculinist experiences. Here dominance has been justified by bias built into the structural principles of institutional standards, or what Derrida refers to as Law, in effect creating a (hu)man discourse. However, the erasure of prominent award-winning women playwrights--who have presumably fulfilled dramatic criteria--is more startling evidence of nonreception in this system of critical judgement, exposing dominance as an exclusionary move beyond the support of accepted institutional standards. The persistence of such dominance--despite ongoing ideological critiques of institutionalised patriarchy by women artists and feminist theorists, and despite subsequent changes in legislation--indicates what Bryan Turner refers to as "patrism", or dominance based on mental prejudice, discrimination and "paternalistic beliefs about the inferiority of women", in The Body and Society. In this climate, women's response to erasure has also been subject to nonreception in the form of reductionism, a lack of serious dialogue, and the negative representation of feminists as "whinging, bra-burning man-haters". Although feminism has engaged in a diverse theoretical and political analysis of social dominance involving gender, race, class and sexuality, the reductionist representation of these critiques as "women's equality" and "women's issues" has historically shifted the problem onto women's shoulders; a marginalising tactic that both limits dialogue and resists feminist criticism of the gender and socioeconomic power structures which affect everyone. Thus we can read the evidence of erasure as a politics of power as dominance or might is right, where exclusion operates with and without the support of institutional standards, by those who have used "power over" as control of representation--and not merely "objective" standards for assessing literature--to preserve a dominant presence through the erasure of texts, the repression of dialogue, and the resistance to critique via marginalisation; all practices in discourse that (re)produce and sustain the dominance of particular worldviews over

others.

The philosophical structures of erasure as justified dominance can be detected by reading deconstructively through the historical interposing of an academic "can(y)on" separating human and woman. In this "dramatic" gap, successful plays by women have been excluded from the canon, represented directly or indirectly as "women's plays" (domestic, trivial, sentimental), while plays by men, regardless of topic, are not commonly known as "men's plays in a men's discourse" but are represented as universal in a human discourse. This representation is a false notion of universality as it excludes the dialogue and texts of women. It also masks what I see as the limiting perception of a core binary opposite between Man and Woman that has been overshadowed by gender bias to produce a (hu)man/woman dichotomy. This dichotomy is supported by Aristotelian logic in the construction of meaning and knowledge. His law of non-contradiction and the identity principle assures that the (hu)man drama discourse is not only dependent upon socially constructed opposites such as male/reason/public and female/emotion/domestic, but also the exclusion of them from defined spaces to avoid contradiction in the construction and preservation of identity. Therefore in the language of reviews, anthologies and literary criticism, I have traced the (op)position of the female artist/theorist and her plays as sites of contradiction and hence subjects for nonproduction in the (hu)man discourse; along with the marginalisation of her texts as "women's" or "feminist", as if to be dealt with only by a women's discourse. This leaves her caught in an impossible position between the definitions of two seemingly opposite discourses, where, as Derrida says about Women's Studies in the University, her success in one is her risk of failure in the other. However, these discourses are not opposite but oppositional, and erasure is indicative of a (hu)man discourse that not only excludes contradiction, but does not receive nor dialogue with critiques from "others" perceived as inferior opposites--a

belief system resulting in male dominance that is evident across the various economic, racial and political spectrums. Thus the standards and prejudices which erased women's texts from the (hu)man discourse meant that women had to mobilise separately as a strategy to gain strength for the articulation of a critique of social dominance, as well as to express and read difference in a more receptive environment. Nevertheless, the name and location of these critiques, texts, and dialogues as "women's" studies in a separate discourse within the academy has become the marginalisation of pluralism that Spivak refers to as the "last bastion of democracy", resulting in a continuing lack of reception and dialogue with men.

In reading the evidence of erasure as exclusion from "objective" structures that supposedly represent the dramatic field, my practice of deconstruction and philosophy of poststructuralist feminism are informed by an intersection of discourses that critique objectivity and articulate the limitations of structures. These discourses in various ways emphasise interconnectedness, or what I call field theory, including feminism as a critique of the interrelatedness of gender and power structures; poststructuralist theories of representation where the intertextuality of language problematises the notion of "real" experience reflected in "literary" representation; and quantum physics by way of analogy where as Louise Crossley says, "relationship and not object is the central metaphor". Field thinking offers a perception shift that includes light as particle but sees the wave; includes either/or but allows the "and"; includes structure but depends on the margin; metaphors that give up the opposition to locate the third value of a nonAristotelian logic which Ulmer in Applied Grammatology refers to as "the excluded middle way". I have used poststructuralist theories, therefore, to unravel the simple binary oppositional logic of traditional critical assumptions and good/bad judgement strategies that have erased women and others from the (hu)man discourse; however, as Barbara

Johnson writes in A World of Difference, deconstruction does not necessarily operate "in a simple, binary, or antagonistic way". My practice then has been not only to find and redefine the erased plays of women, or to argue that erasure is only due to men, but to inhabit the structures of both discourses as a bridge of dialogue within my text; reading difference, sameness, and traces of erasure. In this deconstructive reading I see not men's and women's issues, subjects or discourses, but rather seek a "beyond gender" approach to position that acknowledges the experience of difference, without using it as a platform from which to exercise power through critical judgements that deny the experience or imagination of others.

The social construction of male and female as opposite humans, built upon the "essence" of opposite sex, theoretically can be undone and the gender gulf bridged, but to wear away false opposites requires long term production and dialogue in the intertextual field of discourse. Although as Madonne Miner points out in Radical Teacher, Women's Studies needs to achieve a wider audience in the academy, the risk is to incorporate, challenge and transform within the established structure and practices of the institution, rather than mimic the essentialist gender principles and power politics of "authoritative" experience that underlie the canon. I submit that to achieve transformative dialogue with men, it will be necessary to integrate the "oppositional" texts of women into a full human discourse that values feedback rather than erasure, and as such would look different precisely because of a dedication to constant examination and self-reflexivity versus protecting itself from critique. Here the marginal can be repoliticised by reading why they have been erased, not just as "bad writing" or "nagging" sites of contradiction to be excluded from a (hu)man discourse, but rather as women artists/theorists who employ the strategy of contradiction. These texts can be included as useful critiques of dominant dramatic and social structures in that, as subjects for

production, they can perform the cultural work of increasing the collective awareness of dominance by (re)presenting problematic social contradictions, theorising different definitions of reality and power, and/or utilising innovative styles of dramatic construction. However, altering the power structures of the (hu)man discourse to achieve a full human discourse will require more than logical argument, inclusion via separatism, or equality legislation to address mental belief systems about the inferiority of women, and hence the low motivation of men to read and study, and dialogue with women. The additional challenge here is the erasure of erasure that requires a paradigm shift in oppositional thinking, expanding beyond the definition of power as dominance and, as director Pam Brighton suggests in Women and Theatre, "of reviving and reconstituting whatever is left of our abilities to combine rather than to compete". In addition to altering hierarchical structures, there must also be a mental and emotional growing up that evolves beyond dominance as the historical reaction to difference--a way of thinking reflected by erasure and socioeconomic structures that produce and reproduce dominant ideologies which colonise human imagination and social practices. As Alice Jardine suggests, though it seems impossible, we need to "rethink difference without aggression or defensiveness, or it will continue to think us". Foucault wrote that it is necessary "to give up loving that which dominates and exploits us, power"; yet the largely unreceived suggestion from many feminist theorists is not to give up power but to transform its definition and resulting socioeconomic ideologies, from dominance over others and hierarchy, to strength with cooperation and equal participation. Such an attitudinal change within discourse can be reflected in a radical textuality that is not afraid to encourage dialogue and embrace contradiction in the continual process of transformation; where shared power can be defined within the worldview of an interconnected field, where the chain is only as strong as its weakest link. Perhaps then a reimagining

can be represented of male and female, not on opposite sides of a canyon, but as different yet similar bridges across the same river.

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PART ONE. Introduction: The Traces of Erasure, An Historical Process of Nonreception

The essence of tyranny, as Orwell remarked, is the persistence of a certain world view.
Veronica Brady, Australian Society

The physicist Fritjof Capra sees three imminent transitions which will shake the very foundations of our lives: 'the reluctant but inevitable decline of patriarchy', the decline of the fossil fuel age, and a 'paradigm shift' in our basic way of perception.
Robin Morgan, The Anatomy of Freedom

In Part One, I introduce and develop a strategy for reading the traces of erasure as evidence of dominance in discourse. The product of erasure is the manufactured absence of women playwrights and the repression of dialogue, practices in discourse that (re)produce and sustain the dominance of particular worldviews over others. Through examining critical practices of reception and the representation of women playwrights in the dramatic discourse, as well as in the academy, I will show that the absence of women playwrights and their plays from the dramatic discourse is neither due to nonexistence nor to "bad writing". Instead it can be traced to erasure as an historical process of what amounts to nonreception--sustained negative reception coupled with anthological erasure--where essentialist definitions and prejudiced assumptions, and the power to support them, have resulted in the exclusion of plays by women from the discursive formation of Knowledge. I have found that although plays by women are prolific in text, and a few award winning, they are mostly absent from public places of textual production, including the academy. Although a few appear in early anthologies, they disappear from successive anthologies that constitute the mainstream drama canon, while more recent plays appear in a minimal way within feminist collections or on the curricula of Women's Studies courses. This historical lack of sustained representation has led me to trace the way women and their texts have been represented over time, just as confronting their absence and nonproduction in the academy has led me to

trace the erasure of women as a feature of textual production through methodologies and theoretical assumptions of the dramatic, philosophic, and literary critical discourses. However, the primary purpose is to investigate erasure as evidence of dominance in discourse, rather than as an analysis of the plays themselves.

In Part One, Sections (A) and (B), I demonstrate the evidence of erasure as nonreception by reading the representation of plays by women, and of Women's Studies in the university. This textual evidence provides three main areas of investigation: 1) it exposes a (hu)man/woman dichotomy and the exclusion of women from dialogue that challenges the notion of human universal experience as represented in the canon; 2) it reveals gender biased critical practices in the language of reviews and anthological comments, based on Aristotelian standards, with consistent binary opposites clustered around a core opposite of essentialist male/female gender definitions; and (3), it demonstrates that the erasure of most published women playwrights is evidence of a prejudice which operates with and without institutional support, exposing power as control of representation, not merely "objective" standards. Thus in Part One I explore the evidence of what erasure is and how it is achieved through critical practices and theoretical assumptions of the dramatic discourse, and the evidence that suggests why its politics can be identified as dominance in discourse. In Section (C) I present the theoretical framework that has informed my philosophical position and methodology for reading the erasure of women playwrights. Here I discuss the intersection of several discourses i.e. feminism, physics and poststructuralism, which all point to a shift in perception as they emphasise interrelationship, or what I call field theory, to critique objectivity and articulate the limitations of structures.

Erasure includes, but is more than, the study of absence and its effects in the intertextual field of discourse. Erasure also differs from exclusion via a system of

institutional standards since it must account for the dramatic "rubbing out" of almost all women's texts, including those few plays that have achieved critical success. In my thesis I am most interested in this manufacturing of absence in what really amounts to the nonreception of women's texts, where erasure has left traces in the negative language and gender biased critical practices of what has been represented as the human discourse, but which in effect has the identity of a (hu)man discourse.

As Part One is functioning as a long introduction to the historical problem of erasure, each section in this first part will also have a Preamble to clarify its relationship to the thesis argument. Thereafter, there will be one introduction to each Part, with Part Four functioning as a conclusion.

(A). The Canon Canyon: Human Plays and Women's Plays

Preamble

In Section (A), "The Canon Canyon: Human Plays and Women's Plays", I introduce the reader to the location and perception of plays by women as an opposition between human and woman within the academy, reflecting a problematic (op)position for the woman playwright. By discussing two articles which in different ways question the success of Women's Studies in the University, I will investigate this representation of plays by women and Women's Studies in the University. I do this for the purpose of locating and challenging the notion of universal human experience as represented in an academic canon where texts by women and dialogue with women have been repressed. While plays by men are regarded as human and not "men's" plays, yet many successful plays by women have been excluded from the canon, being historically represented directly or indirectly as "women's" plays. Such a representation signifies a metaphorical canyon whereby these plays have not been equally received for inclusion and dialogue within a so-called human discourse. As we shall see in the language of the reviews discussed in Section (B), this false notion of human universality also masks the core opposition between Man and Woman that has been overshadowed by prejudice to produce a (hu)man/woman dichotomy in a gender biased (hu)man discourse that has found it necessary to exclude published, successful texts by women.

In the first article, "Another Woman's Play? Doesn't that make like number 6?", Madonne Miner, presents her experience with teaching plays by women within a mainstream drama course. A male student complained about reading plays by women as "yet another woman's play", while discussion revealed that the students regarded plays by men as human. Miner's article raises questions about the perceptions of universality and importance of men's texts, and the difficulties of achieving a broader appreciative audience by Women's Studies within the academic institution. Derrida's

article, "Another Cell in the Beehive", takes the issue of incorporation further by posing the difficult position of Women's Studies within a masculinist institution where he suggests that its success in one is its very risk of failure in the other; he points out that as Women's Studies proves its necessity it also becomes part and parcel of the institutional power structure without being able to transform it. These are interesting comments suggesting that Women's Studies has not been received as another perspective within the human discourse which can successfully achieve transformative dialogue in the university, but rather is perceived and nonreceived as an opposite, separate discourse that can only succeed somewhat ambiguously within an institution defined and dominated by a (hu)man discourse.

The standards and prejudice which resulted in the erasure of women's texts from the (hu)man discourse meant that women had to mobilise separately as a strategy to read and express difference, as well as to articulate a feminist critique of social dominance. However, the name and location of this critique as "women's" studies in a separate discourse has inadvertently followed what I will show in Section (B) to be an historical pattern of nonreception and marginalisation of plays by women as "women's plays" and "women's issues" (domestic, emotional), resulting in a pluralistic marginalisation and the lack of transformative dialogue with men in a human discourse. Such representations of plays by women and Women's Studies provides the investigative map of my research where I will trace the erasure of women playwrights as it has constituted the impossible position of the female artist, who is caught between the theoretical definitions of the (hu)man discourse and the representation of her texts as "women's" or "feminist" as if to be dealt with only by a supposedly opposite, separate women's discourse.

* * * *

In her article, "Another Women's Play? Doesn't that make like number 6?", Madonne Miner exposes the perception of a (hu)man/woman dichotomy, when she tried to integrate 'Women's Studies' within the mainstream curriculum of an institution largely centered around a male-dominant canon. Miner relates that fifteen weeks into a Introduction to Drama course, after reading eleven plays by men and one by a woman, Glaspell's Trifles, a male student responded with what became the title of her article, when asked to read Marsha Norman's Getting Out:

> And yet here's this response paper asserting that Norman's drama is 'yet another women's play' and implying that my particular reading list is biased, unbalanced, askew. I'm dumbfounded; and I'm angry ... As I calm down, I realize I must think about my response along with my student's response. (Radical Teacher, 1)

Arguing over why they weren't getting "the real thing" Miner asked them to define a "women's" play. Finally they agreed that it was one which "focused on issues of interest primarily to women" (3). When asked "is there such a thing as a 'men's play'" a female student replied, "of course not. There are just women's plays and human plays" (3). The next time Miner taught this course she adopted a different strategy: 1) she selected "an anthology which at least allowed for issues other than those specifically coded 'male' to arise; 2) she supplemented the anthology with plays that focus on and raise questions about women; and 3) she raised questions in class discussion "about gender and its effects--on characters, on actors and actresses, on playwrights". She exposed the intertextuality of text and social practice by bringing in copies of women's critical texts, excerpts of prefaces, Ibsen's speech to the Norwegian Association for Women's Rights, etc. Also, in the attempt to avoid plays focusing mostly on men, like Oedipus, Hamlet, or Tartuffe, she had:

> resorted to plays which evidenced an interest in male/female interaction, plays which often used this interaction as structural basis from which to raise other questions: about interpretation, justice, honesty, human rights, classism, and so

> on. In order to accomplish their purposes, these plays allowed major speaking roles to women. Unaccustomed to such a rout of noisy females, my students rebelled. (emphasis mine; 2)

However, when the students began asking questions about gender, they also asked "with a fair amount of hostility in their voices: 'are all of our plays about male/female conflict?'" (3). Miner challenged the students about this perception, asking "did such a description accurately reflect the concerns of these plays?" (3). Though Miner points out that the plays raised questions about many other social issues, when raised within what students perceived as "women's" plays, they were reduced to "male/female conflicts", of interest primarily to women, while other social issues were overlooked and ignored. I would argue that the students were simply mimicking the dominant critical attitudes and reductionism of a society that separates the public and private sphere into male and female realms; that regards things which women do or things that affect women as being of interest primarily only to women; and thus disregards other things women may be representing about the broader social picture. We will see this phenomenon consistently in the reviews discussed in Section (B).

Afterwards, Miner's class was able to address its own biased belief system that assumed men's experiences were universal human experiences but female experiences were not. This led to why plays by women were not included in drama anthologies, and even moved them to question why plays should be classified as 'women's' or 'black' or 'gay' plays "while white men's plays are just plays?" (4). Miner's last question was about what really caused her students' discomfort, "the sustained presentation of male/female conflict OR the sustained presentation of females as main-stage characters" (3), and they never got around to answering it, though she feels it may have been important:

> as it might have encouraged students to consider how our readings differed from what they were accustomed to, and what that difference might tell us about their education--past and present. (3)

The students' discomfort does indicate that false representations of universality in education as well as in the larger social sphere have affected their perceptions of dominant social paradigms like gender, resulting in negative and restrictive connotations for women playwrights. With these misperceptions of universality, the situation for a woman playwright is thus a crisis of reception and representation between two perceived discourses: 1) the human, or (hu)man as dominated by male defined traditions in which critics and readers may ignore themes or overlook certain dynamics represented in "women's" plays; and 2) the feminist, or the representation of the text as a woman's play to be worked on only within the discourse of feminist literary criticism, also engaged in its own definitions.

The next point Miner considers is how women have responded to transform this concept of universality and the educational structures that have produced it. M i n e r comments that though universities, individual teachers, and publishers have begun to make more texts by women available, the fact that Women's Studies is not a core curriculum means that there is a different response from students who have more practical considerations:

> While we, feminist faculty, have been proposing and developing courses, testing and adopting new texts ... while publishers have been integrating women and minorities into standard texts ... republishing 'lost' texts; students--reacting to a sluggish economy, a tight job market, a more stringent set of graduation requirements--have begun demanding a more 'traditional' education. I am not speaking here about students who register for Introduction to Women's Studies ... or 'Feminist Theory'. No, I'm speaking about students who quickly skip past such offerings in the course catalog, focusing instead on required courses, courses which presumably provide a standard, identifiable 'product', courses which define the status quo and assure students of its attainability after a semester's work. (2)

The issues surrounding the location of women's work are multiple: first, there is Miner's concern that mainstream students simply do not read it; second, women writers as theorists posit different strategies of reading that could

inform and revise dominant institutional practices if integrated in a receptive fashion; third, there is concern, however, that if women's texts are absorbed into an unchanged institutional system which depends on traditional canonistic standards, they will be read as 'inferior women's' texts. Miner feels that there is a need to address this if Women's Studies is to succeed:

> we must engage in audience analysis; we must assess the clientele and modify our presentation accordingly. I'm not suggesting that we sell ourselves <u>out</u>; I am suggesting that we sell ourselves <u>in</u>. (2)

However, what is the definition of success for Women's Studies? Is it the continuation and strengthening of it as a satellite department within the traditional university model, or is it the integration of women's texts into traditional courses, or is it perhaps the transformation of the university's practices of education based on hierarchical structural principles, the canonical selection and exclusion of texts, and author centered courses, and are these questions really a matter only for feminists?

In "Women in the Beehive" from <u>Men in Feminism</u>, Derrida writes that if Women's Studies does not question the principles of structure in the model of the university, it risks being just another cell in that beehive (191). Given that feminists have questioned social power structures, the more pertinent question may be why these feminists texts are not more significantly received for serious dialogue within mainstream courses? Derrida regards the research work of Women's Studies as both radical and positive, that is:

> one discovers all sorts of things, one exhumes new corpuses, one studies women's literature, one uplifts from under the repression, from out of the realm of the forbidden all sorts of feminine signatures, feminist discourses which were obscured, one brings out not only literary but anthropological, political, and social dimensions. All that is very positive, certainly. (191)

The findings of this "positive" Women's Studies research has revealed the exclusion of women from the canon and the conspicuous absence of women from positions that organise the

University from within, which has led feminists to question the structural laws of social power structures including the university model; although Derrida comments otherwise with respect to Women's Studies in America:

> the effort to put back into question the structural principles which I mentioned before, which construct the university law, the academic law, that is to say, in the end, the social law in general--because the university is not a separate bloc, it represents society, society represents itself through the university--one has the impression that the questioning of this principle is unequally developed in comparison to those studies which we could call 'positive'. (emphasis mine; 191)

Looking back to some early writings on the 'second wave' feminist movement from 1969, it is rather evident that the "questioning of this principle" Derrida refers to, that is, critiquing the structural models which reproduce power inequities, has been a very important issue in the women's movement right from the start of its 'second wave' both in socialist/Marxist feminism and in radical feminism. Documenting the textual evidence of this would produce a bibliographical monument, though I will give some examples below. However, I argue that if Derrida perceives it as "unequally developed", this perception is more likely due to the fact that this critique has been unequally received, because the feminist demand for structural change, and the acknowledgement of men's problematic gender definitions as raised by feminist theory, are precisely those aspects that are resisted and excluded from serious dialogue by those who have assumed power and dominance within social institutions.

Several examples from Michelene Wandor's recent collection of interviews, Once a Feminist, give some idea about the extent to which women in the second wave of feminism also addressed themselves to structural changes. I will underline these specific comments in the following series of quotations, such that all emphasis is mine unless otherwise indicated. Rowbotham writes in "Women's Lib and the New Politics" from 1969:

> The so-called women's question is a whole people

> question. It is not simply that our situation can only be fundamentally changed by the total transformation of all existing social relations, but also because without us any such transformation can be only partial and consequently soon distorted. The creation of a new woman of necessity demands the creation of a new man ... The domination of women is at once the most complex and the most fundamental links in the chain. Accordingly in moments of acute social unrest the question of our position leaps to the surface. Our uprising is the most terrible to the conservative, precisely because it is so important for the revolution. The opposition to the women is always more intense than that towards any other group, and it is always expressed in the most hysterical terms. Now while the Left has always included 'the women problem' and 'equal rights for women' on the agenda, it has placed them rather far down. There is a hesitancy and a hopelessness about the issue, a tendency to 'if' and 'but' and 'of course'. This is expressed in a curious fear that the subject is 'diversionary'. Of course it is diversionary. It is one of the largest diversions that could possibly be made--the diversion of one half of the human race towards social revolution. (11)

In "The Beginning of Women's Lib in Britain" Rowbotham quotes Irene Fick in Shrew as an example of other women who felt that the struggle was structural, but divided between the public and the private:

> While fighting for economic and social equality in general, under the present capitalist society, women must oppose male chauvinism and domination in personal life. Only with the ending of 'class society' was women's liberation possible. (20)

Another woman from a different issue of Shrew makes a similar comment:

> We have to make it explicit from the start that women's common problems can only be solved by means of a radical social change in the framework of the existing system. (21)

Sandra Peers discusses a union meeting on equal pay:

> One thing that rather surprised me was the extent to which the women accepted without any show of concern that monogamous marriage and the present family structure are on the way out, and supported abortion on demand. About half of them agreed with it. (qtd. in Rowbotham 26)

In the same collection, Raya Levin writes as a contemporary:

> I think there has been little impact on men in general; superficially, men have realised there are certain things they can't permit themselves any longer. But there is still basically the main culture intact ... To achieve equality with men in the present structure means to adopt their values. You enter a man's world. If you want to compete with them, there's no way they'll let you compete unless it's on their terms. (53)

As Rowbotham notes, even among various groups on the Left, the position of women is considered as a question, a problem, or as a matter of 'equal rights' but no mention is made of the 'gender question' or the 'man question', or the 'equal rights for men' platform. Such historical phrases about women precisely indicate the perception of the male subject as dominant, and in the position of deciding the position of the sub-dominant woman as a problem against a neutral background and structure where men are equal, rather than as a mutual problem of oppression as an item of broad social concern. An older feminist, aged 78, provided the link with the historical women's movement and their experiences with the lack of male participation:

> It has been pointed out that no exercise of power is ever relinquished voluntarily. It always has to be overcome by overwhelming force--not necessarily physical force, but the force of public opinion. In my view it is futile for women to rely on men to fight their battle for them. They must do it themselves--even at the risk of being dubbed 'battle-axes' or any of the traditional moves to discourage revolt. (qtd. in Rowbotham 21)

It seems obvious that certainly some early and more contemporary feminists have been fully aware of this tendency of the male subject--even those on the Left--to ignore their own complicity in the domination of women. Rowbotham quotes several different feminists from some early issues of Shrew:

> I do not intend to ask permission from Peking before proceeding. I do not intend to neurotically consult Marxengelslenin before baring my teeth or my teats. I do not intend to give ladylike (read suck ass) reassurance to radical chauvinists during the course of this struggle, even if it means losing their friendship (ie patronage). (20)

In Sally Alexander's interview, she and Rowbotham remember with embarrassment a 1968 History Workshop with mostly male

students, academics, and unionists:

> We were in the hall at Ruskin, both the hall and the platform were packed, a bunch of us--'us' meaning women--on and around a table on the platform and Sheila made this announcement, and she said, 'We thought it would be a good idea if anyone here who was working on women's history ... '--and there was a roar of laughter. There were shrieks of laughter. (81)

At the same History Workshop, Rowbotham remembers:

> A trade-union man got up and said, 'the trade-union movement is to prevent women having these terrible conditions. What we want is for women to be able to stay at home and not have to go out to work'. I got up and contested that, saying I could understand the feelings of opposition to exploitation, but at the same time it had been very important for women to earn an independent wage, and that this protective attitude was wrong and the point was to improve conditions of working women. Well, this was met with patronising laughter. I think it was from that response we got the idea of having a meeting of women. (28-29)

Women within the feminist movement have been aware of the relationship between the structure and methodology practiced within organisations and the resulting production of power differentials; and that therefore the battle for 'equality' in an unchanged hierarchical system was fraught with problems, as Levin points out:

> I still believe in soviets and believe in grass-roots participation, but I don't believe, and never have, that we can capture the state in a parliamentary way. It's a fallacy to think one can change a state by votes. In order for women to penetrate into the position of power they have to adapt themselves to the structure. And that's what they've done, and that's why they've lost a lot of what made it tremendously exciting in the beginning. I don't pretend I have the solution to the problem. But it definitely is a problem. Any kind of movement that allows itself to be channelled into existing structures is doomed to failure. (52)

Finally, American feminist, Andrea Dworkin, writes on the historically constructed structure or model of power for sexuality suggesting:

> an absolute transformation of human sexuality and the institutions derived from it ... Equality within the framework of the male sexual model,

> however that model is reformed or modified, can only perpetuate the model itself and the injustice and bondage which are its intrinsic consequences. (Our Blood 12-13)

Although the women's movement and Women's Studies have questioned fundamental social power structures and the policies of the university, the 'success' of Women's Studies becomes very relative to its reception as Derrida notes:

> In that sense, the risk of failure of women's studies is the risk of its very own success. The more it proves its positivity, its necessity, and brings proofs to the masculine directors of the university--masculine, whether women or not--the more it legitimizes itself by this power; the more then, it risks to cover up, to forget, or to repress the fundamental question which we must pose. (Men 191).

With this comment Derrida seems to suggest an opposition between a masculine institution and a feminine discourse, where Women's Studies has not been received as another perspective within the human discourse that can achieve transformative dialogue, but rather is perceived and nonreceived as an opposite, separate discourse that can only succeed somewhat ambiguously within an institution defined and dominated by a (hu)man discourse. However, when Derrida claims these directors are "masculine, whether women or not", he insinuates power is essentially masculine, when in fact the directors are only representing what has been appropriated for the definition of masculinity, that is, a patriarchal form of power as male dominance. I would argue that this form of 'power over' others is just a structural mode of power that is dominating and restrictive, but it is not essentially 'male' nor is it essentially masculine nor is it the only definition of power available. What is more important is that the fundamental question being asked of the university model is not one simply for feminists to ask, since as Derrida writes, "the fundamental question we must pose". By this "we" perhaps he acknowledges that a much more significant and equal participation in serious dialogue must occur between men and women, not only about "women" in the university but about the university model itself; and it may

well concern questions about structural transformation, and the kind of power differentials that are achieved through its hierarchical structures, where the selection of canonical texts is by authoritative positions and not say, students. The issue of structural transformation brought up by feminist theorists has been excluded through a lack of reception and serious dialogue with the "women's" discourse, and the marginalising technique which focuses the debate on 'equality' within an unchanged masculinist system--and not because of a lack of development within the feminist discourse, as I will argue later in Part Three, The Response to Erasure.

The debate on where and how to locate Women's Studies may center around whether feminism's theories for alternative structures and practices can actually deconstruct a hierarchical power model from within a university modelled on patriarchal structures and values or whether, as Miner argues, Women's Studies needs to "sell itself in" to the mainstream further because it has been marginalised within the structure by a form of ineffective pluralism. Derrida poses this question for Women's Studies as a certain kind of risk:

> This would include, for example, whoever suggests that we do not need Women's Studies departments at all, and that it's not necessary to construct institutions of this sort, that it is necessary that the concern finds other routes outside the universities where departments are established on the old model. Those--whether men or women--who risk that question, also risk in one form or another being rejected by that which calls itself Women's Studies. (191)

Though these questions may risk rejection, yet the more difficult task for feminism and the Women's Studies discourse, when defining its own practices, will be to incorporate, challenge and transform this model without mimicking the structural and power principles of the (hu)man discourse. Women's Studies within institutions may have become part of the beehive, but this does not mean that as a discourse it must become parcel to the university's power or

structural tenets. The research itself can have an impact on people who, in their social movements, do transgress beyond the boundaries of the university structure. Further, as feminist studies also incorporates social practices through various women's political and social organisations at a grass roots level, there are other strategies outside the university model being employed to raise awareness of discriminatory and oppressive power structures as they impinge upon people.

(B). Appearance/Disappearance: On the Trail of a Core Opposition

Preamble

Opening night seems a triumph. But I know better. I look into people's eyes for the Truth of my immediate future. I am an anticipatory ghost of that future. Tomorrow, a few hours hence, will find the congratulatory screams frozen into sneers. My fear paralyzes my brain, immobilizes my will. The reviews, the reviews as yet unread, fill my mind. I have been through this before and I know ... I see myself forevermore as a writhing mass of entrails, an involuntary invertebrate, a non-cerebrate, a creature of patterns, of reflexes, of all-encompassing terror. And I cut my own throat in response, and I amputate my own breast, and the poisoned milk of my amputated breast backs into my cattleslaughtered throat, and bile spills from the widely-grinning mouthslash of my butchered throat, spills burning on the fresh wound of my amputated breast.

Myrna Lamb, Woman as Writer

... New York Times critic Walter Kerr, and Newsday's George Oppenheimer felt that Lamb's work was merely a puritanical, anti-sex lecture. And Dick Brukenfeld, reviewer for The Village Voice, took an ambivalent stand. Praising the playwright's courage and wit, Brukenfeld nevertheless found little satisfaction in the story, which for him, proceeded by a logic that was neither masculine nor feminine, 'just dangerous'.

Judith Olauson, The American Woman Playwright: A View of Criticism and Characterisation

The profound political intervention of feminism has indeed been not simply to enact a radical politics but to redefine the very nature of what seemed political--to take politics down from its male incarnation as a changeseeking interest in what is not nearest to hand, and to bring it into the daily historical texture of the relations between the sexes. The literary ramifications of this shift involve the discovery of the rhetorical survival skills of the formerly unvoiced. Lies, secrets, silences, and deflections of all sorts are routes taken by voices or messages not granted full legitimacy in order not to be altogether lost. If writerliness is defined as attention to the trace of otherness in language, as attention to the way in which there is always more than one message, then it is hard to see how a true instatement of the power of the other voices is possible without something like a writerly apprenticeship... It would thus probably never be false to say that to privilege writerliness is conservative--though I'm not sure it would always be true--but writerliness itself is conservative only in the sense that it is capable of inscribing and conserving messages the radicality of which may not yet have been explored.

Barbara Johnson, A World of Difference

In Section (B), "Appearance/Disappearance: On the Trail of a Core Opposition", I pursue what Barbara Johnson refers to above as an "apprenticeship in writerliness", seeking to pay attention to the critical judgements that might provoke the words of women playwrights like Myrna Lamb above, and to explore the "radicality" of messages that may have been lost to erasure. This section focuses on the traces of erasure to discover what erasure is apart from the appearance and then disappearance of plays by women. I will look at reception to give some answers as to "how" and "why" erasure is accomplished through critical practices and prejudice in the dramatic discourse. (Later, Part Two will deconstructively analyse the philosophical foundations of those practices to explore more deeply the "how" and "why" of erasure as a tool of dominance in the intertextual field of discourse.)

In a discussion of the reviews, anthologies and articles, I will remind the reader of the gender biased critical practices that are so often negative towards the plays of women and women authors, whose gender identity is clearly a problem when it comes to satisfying the requirements of producing "good" drama. Reading with a deconstructive eye, the critical language and assumptions of the (hu)man drama discourse reveal consistent interpretive and authorial judgements based on a multitude of binary opposite definitions, the most endemic being logic/emotion, public/private, and professional/amateur. These are all clustered around what I call the core binary opposite of essentialist male and female gender definitions that privilege masculinist experience, and are incorporated from the social text into the literary critical texts of the dramatic discourse. Based on this core opposition, the critics frequently attack style and construction; ignore or explain away innovations in dramatic technique; undermine the author's authority, experience or imagination; trivialise or exclude "publicly" related themes while emphasing domestic or romantic features; and directly or indirectly classify and reduce women's texts to "women's" plays and "women's" issues.

The reviews and anthological commentaries give a picture of erasure as a historical process of nonreception, where prejudiced assumptions and the power to support them, have resulted in the exclusion of plays by women from the discursive formation of Knowledge, even when they meet publication standards, achieve public success, and manage to win awards. (In Part Two I will go on to trace the gender biased standards as derived from Aristotelian logic, rules, and definitions that in effect created the identity of a (hu)man discourse, where dominance has been supported by prejudice built into the institutional structures.) However, the erasure of award winning women playwrights is a more startling discovery of nonreception in this system of critical judgement because it is an exclusionary move beyond the support of institutional standards, exposing a dominance based on mental prejudice and discrimination. Thus we can begin to identify a politics of erasure as might is right, where exclusion has operated with and beyond institutional support, by those who have used "power over" as control of representation, and not merely "objective" institutional standards. We can conclude that the western great dramatic tradition as represented in drama anthologies is not therefore mimetic of the best of the field as it claims to be, but rather has created the reality of dramatic greatness through selective representation according to the prejudices and power structures of the (hu)man discourse.

* * * *

How is it that despite successful performance runs, publications, Pulitzer Prizes, Obie and other dramatic awards, the historical representation of plays by women has largely been characterised as long term absence from drama anthologies and educational curricula[1] in the face of continuous and prolific writing by women playwrights? A study of the Cumulative Drama Index lists many published plays by women, including award winners and plays such as Susan Glaspell's Trifles which was (for a short time) considerably anthologised in small drama collections. However, the drama indexes indicate that these texts drop out and in fact are only rarely collected in the definitive survey drama anthologies.

The examination of various drama anthologies which follows depicts the limited numbers of women playwrights represented, comparing unfavourably to the numbers of published authors recuperated by feminist researchers.[2] Anthologies that seem to have large numbers of women are marked with an asterisk and explained after the Table; basically it reflects small numbers of women within very large anthologies.

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[1] For example, in 1989 my own survey of colleges and universities in Australia for numbers of women playwrights taught in the drama curricula, revealed that most institutions included zero to very few women. In the minimal representation situation, the most frequently included authors were Dorothy Hewett and Katharine Prichard. If the curriculum included more than these two, there were occasional combinations of authors such as Betty Roland, Jill Shearer, Hannie Rayson, along with more modern playwrights such as Jennifer Compton, Alma De Groen, Caryl Churchill, and Pam Gems. Several instructors stated that they changed authors from year to year. There was one inclusion of Aphra Behn and Maria Fornès, and one black American playwright, Ntozake Shange. Wandor's Methuen Series, Plays By Women, was cited once as an included volume, as was Sullivan and Hatch's Plays By and About Women. At two universities there were courses entitled 'Women and Theatre' and 'Drama and Feminism' with markedly substantial representation of women playwrights and feminist critical writers.

[2] For lists of women playwrights see the books of Chinoy and Jenkins, Debra Adelaide, and Rachel France.

Table of Anthologies

American Modern Drama	Women Authors
20 Best Plays of Modern American Theater, 1939	1
25 Best Plays of Modern American Theater, 1949	2
Discussions of Modern American Drama, 1966	2
American Playwrights: A Critical Survey, 1980	4
Australian Drama	
Eight Plays by Australians, One-Act, 1934	5
Five Plays by Australians, 1936	1
Best Australian One-Act Plays, 1937	7
Six Australian One-Act Plays, 1944	2
*Towards an Australian Drama, 1953	10
Australian One-Act Plays, v. 1-3, 1962-67	2
Six One-Act Plays, 1970	2
*The Making of Australian Drama, 1973	19
Five Plays for Stage, Radio, TV, 1977	0
After 'The Doll', 1979	1
Contemporary Australian Playwrights, 1979	3
*Australian Drama 1970-85, 1987	
Australian Contemporary Drama, 1909-82, 1985	13
*Contemporary Australian Drama, 1987	11
British Modern Drama	
Modern English Playwrights, 1927	2
Modern British Dramatists, 1968	0
Revolutions in Modern English Drama, 1972	0
50 Modern British Plays, 1982	0
World Drama, American, British, European	
A Treasury of the Theatre, 1951	2
Modern English, European & American Drama, 1964	0
*Modern World Drama, 1972	20
*Modern Drama in America & England, 1950-70, 1982	24
The Crown Guide to the World's Great Plays, 1984	3
Types of Drama	
Modern Poetic Drama, 1934	0
Thirty Famous One-Act Plays, 1949	4
Theme of Loneliness in Modern American Drama, 1960	1
Experimental Drama, 1963	2
Theatre of Revolt, 1964	0
English Dramatic Form, 1660-1760, 1981	1
Modern Australian Styles, 1982	0
Transformations in Modern European Drama, 1983	0

Drama to Restoration

A History of Restoration Drama, 1660-1700, 1923	2
Restoration Comedy, 1660-1720, 1924	1
A Bibliography of English Printed Drama to Restoration, 1959	0
Annals of English Drama, 975-1700, 1964	4
English Drama of the Restoration and 18th Century, 1968	4
Restoration & 18th Century Theatre Research, 1969	2
English Drama to 1710, 1971	0
English Drama, 1660-1800, 1976	0
Critics, Values & Restoration Comedy, 1982	0
English Drama: Restoration and 18th Century, 1988	2

Modern Drama

A Study of the Modern Drama, 1925	2
Essays on Critical Appreciation of Modern Drama, 1931	0
A History of Modern Drama, 1947	0
Modern Drama, 1952	0
Drama: from Ibsen to Eliot, 1952	0
Masters of Modern Drama, 1962	0
Directions in Modern Theater & Drama, 1965	2
Modern Drama: Authoritative Texts, 1966	0
'Modernism' in Modern Drama, 1966	0
The Moral Impulse, 1967	0
Modern Drama & Social Change, 1972	0
Modern Theater & Drama, 1973	1
Drama from Ibsen to Brecht, 1973	0
Fields of Play in Modern Drama, 1977	0
Language of Modern Drama, 1977	0
Metafictional Characters in Modern Drama, 1979	0
Essays on Modern Drama, 1987	0

Most often, the same authors are included from one text to the next by historical period, so that you might find Rachel Crothers, Susan Glaspell, Sophie Treadwell, Lillian Hellman, Lady Isabella Gregory, Alice Gerstenberg, and Elizabeth Baker represented here and there in the earlier anthologies. As can be seen, they disappear in the later modern drama texts which cover drama from Ibsen onwards, but you occasionally find more recent authors such as Megan Terry or Rochelle Owens. Lillian Hellman seems to survive as the most often anthologised women playwright, although she never received a Pulitzer prize, as did other American playwrights Zoë Akins, Zona Gale and Susan Glaspell.

In Australia, of the five women authors who won the distinguished Playwright's Advisory Board Competition from

1945 to 1960, only one had her play published in 1945, with a second finally collected in the Penguin Anthology of Australian Women Writers in 1988. The authors most often anthologised are Dorothy Hewett, Alma de Groen, Jennifer Compton and, less frequently, Dymphna Cusack and Katharine Prichard. The production history of Prichard's play, Brumby Innes, is of interest since it was not performed until forty-five years after its writing when it was finally received with success in Melbourne. The 1987 anthology, Contemporary Australian Drama, only discusses Hewett in depth but does briefly mention eleven other playwrights. In his large histories of Australian drama, Leslie Rees always included a chapter on women dramatists saying:

> In Australia women do at least as well as men, whether in tragedy or in any other form. In a country where stage playwrighting is largely a self-indulgence, possibly women have more spare time than men. They certainly have as much talent (Towards 112)

In his most recent book, Rees discusses Hewett, de Groen and Compton in depth, mentions about ten others and then questions why there were so few successful women writers in the 70s. Successful may be the key word as there were at least twenty-two authors who had their plays performed, besides the three he discusses.[3]

Under the world drama section, Modern World Drama stands out with the highly unusual number of twenty women authors, but this was a very large dictionary type anthology of one thousand pages and vast entries, so proportionately the representation is extremely small; this is also the case with Modern Drama in America & England which has several hundred entries. The most recent American drama listing includes four women playwrights, but this text had two editors, and all four articles on women were written by the female editor. In the Restoration Drama area, there is a core group of women included, namely Aphra Behn, Mary Pix, Catherine Trotter, and

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[3] From a thesis in progress by Gayle Poole, as well as published plays from my own research work, including plays from The Women's Theatre Group, and work done by the Women's Theatre Project.

Susan Centilivre. However, Nancy Cotton's book Women Playwrights in England 1363-1750, lists thirty-four women authors, with numerous plays, six unacted, and several consigned for the Court.

Early Erasure

Overall, women dramatists are represented in a piecemeal fashion, with historical and specifically modern drama anthologies sadly lacking in their texts, creating the impression that great drama has only been written by men. Selection itself is a limitation to be sure, but the construction of historical anthologies that exclude the innovative work of women while all innovations in drama are ascribed to men, creates the myth that men initiate and women consolidate or imitate if, indeed, they write at all. As my own and other feminist research shows, not only is this inaccurate, but it is based on subjective assumptions of value within the drama genre such as privileging high drama over folk, the classic over the popular, and the three-act over the one-act.

In the area of innovations, American author Alice Gerstenberg's play Overtones (1913), is anthologised in Plays by and About Women with the editorial comment that "she was probably the first expressionistic playwright in America, using the technique of inner and outer characterization a decade before Eugene O'Neill" (423). In 30 Famous One-Act Plays, 1949, Richard Watts, Jr. comments in the introduction that this play "has been described as a sort of forerunner of O'Neill's Strange Interlude, although that is true only in the sense in which it can be said that The Drums of Oude foreshadowed The Emperor Jones" (xxi). Investigation shows that Drums is a little known text about an Indian uprising, used by the U.S. War Department in 1918 as part of training camp activities, while Emperor is about a Negro taking power in the West Indies. I see this is a "sort of" denial about origins as Watts shifts from talking about being forerunner of a similar technique, to foreshadowing only by virtue of similar textual setting.

Another example of lost distinctions would be Millay's verse play Aria da Capo (1918),[4] referred to by Watts as "an anti-war work, which belongs distinctly to a post-war period" (xxi). In Discussions of Modern American Drama, Donna Gerstenberg says:

> Only Aria da Capo seemed to the author to have any enduring value--a modest judgment which most literary historians may yet feel an overestimation. Aria da Capo has the distinction of being one of the first (if not the first) plays in the twentieth century to use the verse stage for political comment, a use which almost wholly occupied the important writers of verse dramas in the late twenties and the thirties (cf. Auden and Isherwood, Spender, MacLeish, and Maxwell Anderson; even Murder in the Cathedral has its political comment to make (39)

She then discusses Millay's considerable wisdom for refusing to publish a collection of her dramatic works, admitting that "for all their conventionality, several of Millay's plays do succeed in creating a conflict and engagement of human emotion" (38). Yet conventions become the focus of Gerstenberg's critical admiration when she discusses a point in the play where the shepherds object to the Masque of Tragedy, saying that "we cannot act/A tragedy with comic properties!" and they are answered, "try it and see. I think you'll find you can./One wall is like another" (Millay 715). Here Aria is referred to as:

> successfully breaking through the never-never land atmosphere of the majority of the verse dramas of its period by frankly accepting the stage as stage and the stereotyped characters as conventions, with the result that the form and the structure of the play, its frank theatricality, work together to make a significant comment on human experience (40)

This "frank theatricality" and political comment in 1918, would have been prior to Brecht's work in the later 1920s.

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[4] This is a musical term for composition in 3 parts, the last repeating the first, and this play opens and closes with scenes of Pierrot and Columbine's traditional frivolities. In between is a scene of two shepherds, supervised by the Masque of Tragedy, who break the pastoral harmony with a division of the stage by a wall of woven coloured ribbons. Their individual possessions cause them to plot each other's murder, counterpointed by off-stage cries of Pierrot pursuing Columbine.

Yet it is his work, known as epic theatre, which became famous for the alienation technique, (unconventional lighting and staging with actors speaking to the audience), a style that demands the audience see the stage as a stage.

Lady Isabella Gregory was an Irish playwright who along with Yeats founded the famous Abbey Theatre, and wrote numerous short political plays based on local events; yet they are devalued as folk drama rather than great drama about a certain kind of folk. Gassner describes them as "flavorsomely colloquial and realistic, and abounding in peasant types and rural backgrounds" in A Treasury of the Theatre (620). A few of her plays, usually The Workhouse Ward, are sprinkled in the older anthologies, but I have also found Rising of the Moon and The Gaol Gate, the latter described by Gassner as "a masterpiece in miniature" (620).[5] While Gassner admits to Yeats' praise of Lady Gregory: "'and now' Yeats remarked in his Dramatis Personae, 'all in a moment, as it seemed, she became the founder of modern Irish dialect literature'" (620), he goes on to say that:

> What Yeats may have overlooked, however, is that in Lady Gregory's opinion it had become absolutely imperative to create such a literature if the Irish theatre was to capture national interest instead of shrinking into a closed circle for esthetes. Yeats' own plays were beautifully spiritual and poetic, but they could not be expected to root the drama in Irish soil. (620)

Gassner overlooks Yeats description of Lady Gregory as a founder, by implying that she really wasn't the single originator of modern Irish dialect, because it was a sort of necessary social discovery--already there waiting to be delivered--to give Irish theatre a national interest for its people. Whereas John Synge, famous for Playboy of the Western World, is described as being completely absorbed in

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[5] The Gaol Gate depicts a mother and wife, visiting the rebel hero in jail who has been hanged the day before for refusing to betray his comrades, though the neighbors gossip that he has informed. Rising of the Moon shows a police sergeant who refrains from arresting a rebel who carries a tempting price on his head.

his own dream, Gassner says "Lady Gregory's dream was not her own but that of her fellow creators and of Ireland" (621). In this kind of language, Lady Gregory disappears as an individual innovative writer and becomes a kind of anonymous social service for the lower classes. Further, Gassner says that:

> It was one of the marks of Synge's genius that he felt impelled to go beyond peasant drama, that he transfigured folk material into a highly personal creation. (621)

This statement not only directly contradicts the usual requirement of universality for art and good writing, it suddenly tries to separate and then privilege the personal style over the socially inspired, political 'folk' dramas of Lady Gregory. With respect to politics as a lesser form of drama, in the introduction to Modern Drama and Social Change, editor Robert Raines questions whether a play can be effective propaganda and great drama. Referring to the work of Brecht and Shaw he concludes:

> Yet all these plays do more than plead for specific and transient political causes. It is this 'more' that moves them beyond the range of propaganda ... Although Shaw's plays did not bring about a humane and equitable socialist world government, they cannot be termed failures. They remain interesting and challenging because of the language, the characterization, the power to make audiences feel and think which universalize them. (emphasis added; 7)

One can only wonder whether the mere peasant characters of Lady Gregory made their audiences feel and think, thereby rendering them universal and candidates for great drama; but it is clear that in the hands of male playwrights such characters can move beyond propaganda, beyond mere folk drama, into a highly personal and yet universal masterpiece. It is also obvious that high drama, regarded as spiritual, poetic (and often highly personal), has survived as great and universal, while the so-called folk plays inspiring national interest and rooted in Irish soil are all but lost, despite Lady Gregory's prolific contributions.

The Crown Guide to World's Great Plays includes only three women playwrights. Joseph Shipley writes in his preface that

the definition of great is subjective and flexible over time, but he also notes that popular plays with lengthy runs "while not perhaps intrinsically great" have been "at least a great success and may call for inclusion on the grounds of history" (v). Thus there is a difference set up in editorial judgement between what 'the people' (commonly known as the general public) find enjoyable versus what the critics consider to be "intrinsically great". After their time, as he puts it, these kind of plays may be omitted as lapsed in significance. and so a time limitation is placed on the value of the popular. In his discussion of Lillian Hellman, he says she presented "humans pressed in the throes of perverse passions--jealousy, hatred, greed". He observes with dismay "that the public favors such figures may be judged from the fact that out of six plays ... five have been hits" (299). This kind of comment could be made about so many plays that it hardly stands as a criticism of Hellman. What is interesting is the labelling of her characters' passions as perverse, while perhaps William Faulkner or Eugene O'Neill present figures whose jealousy and greed are noble, or tragic. Despite Hellman's popular success, she is included in this anthology of great plays.

Treadwell's Machinal (1928), also makes an appearance. Shipley describes it as a "sensitive character study expressionistically conveyed" (781) that had, he says, the high praise of reviewers, though people didn't flock to it. Nevertheless, the fact that it ran for ninety-one performances in New York in 1928 does indicate successful audience attendance. This play seems to be included due to its "intrinsic greatness":

> Machinal is a superbly constructed study, a poignant drama of a woman's bewildered struggle for happiness, which rises to gruelling horror in the closing scenes of the prison and the pitch-dark death house. Its final triumph is that it rises above the machine philosophy it seems to illustrate, and leaves us with the chastening thought that violence, even sought as a path to freedom, does not lead to freedom; freedom and peace reside within. (782)

The play generalises a notorious murder case, representing an

unnamed character, Young Woman, who escapes a complaining mother through marriage to an obnoxious employer. She then finds she loves an adventurous Young Man but, after consummating the love affair, discovers she is only a passing interest to him. She endures a miserable job, a disappointing honeymoon, a horror-filled hospital childbirth, and finally after returning from her Mexican liaison, she kills her husband and is sentenced to die in the electric chair. This play, described as the "most successful play" of the late expressionistic movement in America by the Herald Tribune (Shipley 780), features recurring sounds underneath the dialogue such as typewriter clatter while the woman wonders about marriage, jazz music outside her honeymoon hotel, and steel riveters outside the hospital during childbirth. While Shipley seems comforted by the thought that violence is not the path to freedom, in Moscow, 1933, Alexander Tairov praises the violence in Machinal which was a huge success in 1933:

> Machinal is undoubtedly a considerable event in the domain of western theatrical literature. It sums up the various efforts to represent in an effective and condensed form the mechanized life of a large capitalistic city, its soulless movement in a circle, its standardized existence, its empty dynamic, syncopated rhythm ... the hypocrisy of its sacred institutions, the deathly grip of its blindly moving wheels.... (Shipley 781)

Apparently the British reviewers rose in defense of personal responsibility rather than addressing the social construction of female victims, with the Observer (19 July 1931) noting:

> Really, young women cannot be allowed to despatch their husbands because they happen to dislike them, and my sympathies were wholly with the victim of the crime and not at all with the heroine of the play and victim of the law-courts and gaol. (qtd. in Shipley 781)

Machinal meant different things in different places, but it could hardly be called only a character study and certainly has not lapsed in social relevance. Although included in Shipley's collection, I do not think it has been revived since the 1930s. Reading through other older plays by women which were published and had successful performance runs like

the above, I found their subjects both historically interesting and still relevant--not only personally, but in comparison to recent topics of contemporary women playwrights.

Like most drama anthologists, Shipley leaves out one-act plays which might explain the exclusion of Glaspell's Trifles (1916). It is based on her short story called "A Jury of Her Peers" and unfolds into the still timely and widely represented subjects of male dominance in marriage, domestic violence, and the isolation of women. In this apparently simple plot, a woman is suspected of murder by detectives who lack a convincing motive, while two women neighbors think they discover it when cleaning up in the kitchen. They notice the sudden irregular mistakes in the woman's knitting and begin to talk about how her husband was difficult; that he had stopped her outside activities, including singing in the choir, and so she had bought a bird instead. The women begin to realise, somewhat guiltily, that they didn't visit her very much. Finally, they find the woman's bird cage and the dead bird with a broken neck stuffed under the cupboard; in a mutual glance they realise what has happened. Though tense and fearful, they decide to hide the bird in a pocket before the detectives, who cannot be bothered investigating such 'trifles', can see it. Trifles enjoyed audience success, was widely published and anthologised before disappearing from modern collections.

One-act plays have historically been discriminated against and are usually only collected as a specialty. This is indicative of the privileging of the standard three act 'well-made' play which, according to Aristotle, used to necessitate a full five acts. Brander Matthews in A Book About the Theater (1916) argued that there really was no artistic justification nor logical necessity for the five-act play, but that if one accepts:

> the Unity of Action as a general rule, binding upon all artists, we can hardly deny that the most obviously natural arrangement for the story is to set it forth in one act, without any intermission or subdivision whatsoever--a single action in a single

act. (59)

Yet he immediately goes on to say:

> Yet it is the play in three acts which we are bound to recognize at once as possessing the ideal form, since it enables the dramatist to set apart the three divisions, which Aristotle declared to be essential to a well-constructed tragedy--the beginning, the middle, and the end--each presented in an act of its own. (emphasis mine; 59)

However, Elizabeth Everard, editor of The International One-Act Play Theatre, (1934) argues that one-act plays have always been popular and that, in the 18th century, audiences would digest four or five plays in one evening. She feels it is only the twentieth century which has denigrated the one-act play:

> In conclusion, it cannot be too often reiterated that the one-act play is not a mere curtain-raiser, a handmaiden to the play of several acts. It has, on the contrary, a separate and authentic form of its own--a form which, with its strict economy, makes for intensity and strength. One critic of the one-act play has pointed out that as an art form it has its limitations. True. But does that not apply to all forms of art? Is it not the function of form to limit? And is it therefore a valid reason for neglecting one, any more than the other, form of dramatic art? (emphasis added; 6-7)

Both contemporary and earlier women playwrights have written more than a few longer plays, but it is also true that a great deal of them have employed the one-act play, with serious consequences in terms of anthological selection committees who view great drama as a three act construction. Everard points out that most famous playwrights have written one-act plays but only their longer works are remembered. Her observation indicates critical standards which privilege the more classical style, but the denigration of the one-act play also signifies a short/long opposition where longer is perceived as better because it must be more structurally complex, and therefore more potent drama. An alternative argument Everard poses is that the one-act play, like poetry, has a complex economy of form with its own difficulties and intensities that make it different, but equally as valid as the three-act play.

I have been exploring the few texts that do include women authors as a means of providing information on the anthological construction of the dominant notion of 'good' drama, and how this has affected the interpretations of plays by women. However, these texts are also worth investigating for the underlying assumptions made about the identity of women writers, which leads to ferreting out not only what is supposedly great dramatic form, but also who can achieve it. Successful women playwrights are often dismissed as amateurs, their subject matter and characters are reduced to the dull and ordinary, and their plots are seen as minimal or are summarised in such a way as to exclude social issues about women's lives. Further, the recurrent criticism that they are deficient in logic, and thus in the construction of plays is based on an essentialist construction of the feminine gender with women as biologically emotional creatures. This has led to a series of criticisms based on women's ingrained melodramatic tendencies, their lack of realism, or their poor morals, such that women's social gender definitions were being imposed both upon them as authors and upon the interpretations of their plays.

It is interesting to note the various editorial references to the women as amateurs in three older anthologies edited by very influential men in the theatre of the early 1900s, which have included the internationally successful British playwrights Elizabeth Baker, Gertrude Robins, and Githa Sowerby. Despite Baker's continued successes with nine plays from 1907 to 1921, John Cuncliffe refers to her as an amateur in Modern English Playwrights (1927), saying "that she wrote plays in her leisure hours for her own pleasure" (emphasis mine, 161). In A Study of Modern Drama (1925), Barrett Clark also declares he has evidence from one of Baker's letters that she writes plays in her leisure hours, but then makes a quantum leap to define amateurism: "Baker is an amateur in the true sense: she writes plays because she likes to write them" (emphasis mine, 306). From these statements we might surmise a perception that the professional artist/writer

worked at only their art, perhaps even suffered from it, and probably disliked it. Since Baker was a full-time London clerk before becoming a private secretary, it would obviously be necessary to write after working hours. But this is also the case for T.S. Eliot who was, of course, a bank clerk. Since her play, Chains (1909), (which among other things represents the oppression of the clerk class and the lack of career options for women) was seen in most repertory theaters of Great Britain and New York (Clark 306), it hardly seems she was writing merely for her own pleasure. However, the fact that she used the term "leisure hours" signified pleasure (and her own) according to Clark and Cuncliffe's professional/amateur opposition, where their logic dictates that if she did it in her leisure, then she must have liked it. And since she was paid to be a clerk, she couldn't be a professional playwright.

A similar definition of amateur appears in reference to Gertrude Robins, with the added dimension that professional playwrights must only write plays. In Clark's Representative One-Act Plays of British and Irish Playwrights (1921) he states that "her plays, which must have been the products of her leisure time, were written to fill certain definitely felt needs" (324). Clark then tries to construct her as an amateur by emphasising her wide range of other activities. He quotes from an interview with Robins where she admits "I lead a very active life, and my interests range from Small Farming and Aviation ... to the Art of the Marionette" (323). He goes on to say that she was really better known as an actress than a dramatist, even though she wrote fourteen successful plays from 1908-1914, while 'only' playing the lead in five productions. That she thought of herself as a playwright is obvious from her comment, "after all, variety is the spice of life and the pursuit of experience is the playwright's prerogative" (emphasis mine; 324). That she felt innovative and successful in her work is evident when she speaks about her plays in the provinces, noting the truth (for her) of an adage that "what Manchester thinks today,

London does tomorrow" (323). She went on to say that her one-act play, Makeshifts (1908), (representing the stifled lives of two sisters, one a teacher and the other a houseservant looking after their ageing mother), had played over a thousand times in Great Britain, Australia, Canada and America. Her reason for entering the theatre was as follows:

> At the outset I thought I would take up one of the learned professions, but I discovered that for a woman to follow such a career the drawbacks of sex are strongly defined. I ultimately decided that the theatrical profession offered a wider and fairer scope for a woman's activities. (324)

In addition to the representation of women playwrights as amateurs, both Cuncliffe and Clark as critics seem trapped in the dilemma of reconciling the popularity and dramatic success of these plays with their departure from traditional notions of great drama. Choice of characters seems to be a vital issue. Writing about Sowerby and Baker, Clark says that "both these women have gone to everyday life for their material, both have cared and dared to write about dull, ordinary people" (Study 306). Sowerby's Rutherford and Son represents the intellectual and emotional exploitation wrought upon a family in a town dominated by a tyrannical businessman who clawed his way up from the working class and now sacrifices people's lives to the Rutherford Works. Cuncliffe admits to the success of Rutherford, but he diminishes the power of the script by emphasising the actors, saying "it was a powerful middle-class play which made a great impression on both sides of the Atlantic, partly, no doubt, owing to the excellent acting of Norman McKinney" (164). Cuncliffe describes Sowerby's play as "her one masterpiece" (169), but in doing so he must also elevate the status of the characters, even though they have described themselves as common in the text:

> Rutherford, Janet and Mary are real people without being common-place, and in the conflict of their wills and passions there is an emotional interest which the vain and fitful struggles of the mere flies caught in the spider web of industrialism cannot evoke in us. Her technique is no less masterly than that of her con-temporaries dealing with the merely weak and

obscure.... (emphasis added; 169)

Cuncliffe remains trapped in an Aristotelian mandate that tragedy and high drama are only for the great characters of the nobility and upper class. With Baker's Chains he also tries to cope with plays about "the lower-middle-class sort" (161) whose lives do not seem to have good plots:

> The characters illustrate precisely what Gissing described as the life of the ignobly decent; they have no vices--at any rate none of those interesting from a dramatic point of view; they are simply dull, some of them absolutely inane in their colourless virtue. They read cheap papers, and sing silly songs on weekdays, and on Sunday chant vapid hymns. (162)

In addition to situating the characters as dull and ordinary, both editors attack the lack of dramatic plot by referring to William Archer's work in Playmaking. He defines the dramatic and undramatic, describing the "young naturalistic" movement as "the type of play that presents a broad picture of a social phenomenon, but that in it no attempt should be made to depict a marked crisis" (emphasis added; Study 306). The problem for these critics is trying to prescribe great drama standards in the new naturalistic mode, because they are caught between the classic description of great tragedy as a marked crisis for the noble class, versus the perception of what therefore must be limited crises in the lives of the working class. Archer's definition of naturalism is thus based on an essentialist opposition between the upper and lower class, leading to a separatist perception where the upper class sees the lower class as somehow suffering less than themselves, perhaps to lessen any guilt for the oppressive conditions of the working class.

Regarding Baker's Chains, Clark cites Archer fully, and I will as well, in order to show another strategic gap in Archer's observations about playmaking, this time involving the lack of plot and dramatic subject matter:

> There is absolutely no 'story' in it, no complication of incidents, not even any emotional tension worth speaking of ... A city clerk, oppressed by the deadly monotony and narrowness of his life, thinks of going to Australia--and doesn't go; that is the sum and substance of the action. Also, by way of underplot, a

> shopgirl, oppressed by the deadly monotony and narrowness of her life, thinks of escaping it by marrying a middle-aged widower--and doesn't do it. If any one had told the late Francisque Sarcey or the late Clement Scott, that a play could be made out of this slender material, which should hold an audience absorbed through four acts, and stir them to real enthusiasm, these eminent critics would have thought him a madman. Yet Miss Baker has achieved this feat, by the simple process of supplementing competent observation with a fair share of dramatic instinct. (emphasis added; Study 307-8)

With the dismissal of the clerk and shopgirl's lives as deadly and narrow, the play's representations of monotonous work, long hours, and low pay with textual references to socialism are obviously missed areas of thematic interest to Archer. He ignores another centrally important theme, property rights and marriage, by labelling the shopgirl's story an underplot, which Cuncliffe also does by calling the shopgirl a "small side issue" (162). The actual text, however, represents both the city clerk and his wife's sister, Maggie, (the shopgirl), as being equally inspired by the clerk's lodger who has quit his job to emigrate to Australia. This causes a marked crisis for both of them as they debate about the deadly monotony of their jobs and their limited possibilities for freedom. Though the clerk secretly plans to go and send for his wife after he gets a farm, he gives up in despair when his wife makes the timely announcement that she is pregnant. Maggie, however, decides in the end that she cannot use marriage as an escape from her job because she would lose all her individual freedom as an English wife. She observes that women have different ways of showing their courage and, therefore, it is not that Maggie simply doesn't get married, she actually demonstrates her choice of freedom by keeping her job with the hope of eventual emigration to Canada. Of the two characters in an interwoven plot, it is Maggie who emerges as the heroine of Chains. For Archer and Cuncliffe, their criticism about a lack of plot and dramatic subjects more accurately reflects their own subjective perception of the story as uninteresting since they readily admit that audiences were interested,

while their critical appraisals exclude themes, emphasise male characters, and trivialise female characters. Clark goes on to wonder whether Chains is a well-made play, discussing Russian dramatists who reject action as a necessary requirement. But then he dismisses her innovations saying that "Miss Baker, who doubtless has no definite theories, allows her 'ordinary' characters to work out their own destiny, without the aid of explanation" (emphasis mine; Study 308). He concedes that Baker "has shown it was possible to write a successful play without utilizing the ordinary and timeworn conventions" (Study 307). Similarly, Archer refers to Baker's achievement of holding the audience's interest in ordinary people and the "deadly monotony" of their lives as a "simple" process, which merely combines "observation" with "instinct". The thought and skill as a dramatist required to construct such a play is displaced, and almost seems the result of an intuitive, leisurely whim.

Finally, Clark actually notices that he has only included two women authors and asks why there aren't any "great or near-great women playwrights?" (Study 309). After musing on the lack of European women writers he addresses British women, saying "Besides Miss Baker, there [is] Githa Sowerby (with her one play)" (Study 309) when, in fact, Sowerby wrote and published seven plays from 1912 to 1924. He admits that in the United States:

> there is a host of clever women who have, on the whole, written just as good plays as all but two or three of the men ... And yet there is none among them who has approached the tragic irony of a Galsworthy, the poetic and imaginative power of a Benavente, the satiric irony of a Shaw. (Study 309)

After this negative conclusion, he wonders whether there is any reason why "a woman should not be as good a playwright as a man" (Study 309). He turns to another theatre expert, Brander Matthews, and his chapter on "Women Playwrights" from A Book about the Theater for some answers:

> Women, it is said, are not lacking in powers of observation; they can write well and with great charm, but they are deficient in the sense of structure,

> without which no dramatist can succeed ... women are likely to have only a definitely limited knowledge of life, and second ... that they are likely also to be more or less deficient in the faculty of construction. (Study 309-310)

Matthews quotes Henry James in support of women as successful novel writers "because it demands little or no definite structure while the play must have it or cease to be" (Study 310). Says Clark, quoting James in Matthews:

> Says James: 'The novel, as practiced in English, is the perfect paradise of the loose end' ... whereas the 'play consents to the logic of but one way, mathematically right, and with the loose end as gross an impertinence on its surface and as grave a dishonor as the dangle of a snippet of silk or wool on the right side of a tapestry'. (Study 310)

Looking at the original chapter on women playwrights, Matthews actually locates the "charm" of women novelists in their "persistent ingenuity ... little miracles of observation, and by little triumphs in the microscopic analysis of subtle and unsuspected motives" (emphasis added; 122). He refutes the real success of women novelists by arguing that "the works of female storytellers not only lack a largeness in topic, but also a strictness in treatment" (120). Here he homes in on the real reason for the lack of female dramatists, which is:

> in the relative incapacity of women to build a plan, to make a single whole compounded of many parts, and yet dominated in every detail by but one purpose. The drama demands a plot, with a beginning, a middle, and an end, and with everything rigorously excluded which does not lead from the beginning through the middle to the end. (120)

His arguments about plot construction and life experience are actually rooted in an essentialist discourse that attributes qualities to an organism based on biological structure and function. He uses the autobiographical writings of former actress Fanny Kemble who said it was "absolutely impossible for a woman ever to be a great dramatist, because 'her physical organisation' was against it" (116). He quotes her further:

> After all, it is great nonsense saying that intellect is of no sex. The brain is, of course, of the same sex

> as the rest of the creature; beside the original female nature, the whole of our training and education, our inevitable ignorance of common life and general human nature, and the various experiences of existence from which we are debarred with the most sedulous care, is insuperably against it. (116)

Although Matthews is using Kemble because she can be read as capitulating to the nature of woman argument, there might be an element of irony in her statement since her inclusion of social conditioning and limited careers for women also implicates severe discrimination. Matthews entertains the possibility of prejudice but is reassured by several examples of successful women playwrights, including women who have won competitions:

> These examples of woman's competence to compose plays with vitality enough to withstand the ordeal by fire before the footlights are evidence that if there exists any prejudice against the female dramatist it can be overcome. (114)

This is like saying that there is a ghetto but a few persistent ones will rise above it. Yet he retracts this statement immediately by saying "but to grant equality of opportunity is not to confer equality of ability" (114), a statement that denies the long term effects of prejudice and discrimination on women writers. As final proof of women's lack of ability, he cites the obvious absence of historically famous women playwrights. This is a simplistic and familiar position that argues women are incapable playwrights (artists, etc.) since there aren't any great women playwrights. Feminist research has undermined this position by recuperating women writers as well as analysing the social factors which have limited their expression and production.

These anthologists' comments represent an identity of women playwrights as amateurs who can observe details but can't really construct good plots or dramatic subjects, where successful plays arrive almost by whim or instinct. It is clear that these critics are leaning on the faculty of logic as a precursor to the construction of a good play and, since this is a quality they assume women are biologically "more or less" deficient in, it is not simply the construction of the

play which is attacked but rather a denial of women having or using logic. Yet Cuncliffe calls Rutherford "close-knit", "with concentrated force", and with "no straining of probability" as "the tissue of the play unfolds itself inevitably and arrives at an inevitable conclusion--unforeseen, but felt to be right and necessary after it has been unfolded" (emphasis mine; 169). And Clark actually praises Baker for writing a successful play without "timeworn conventions" (Study 307), while Shipley calls Machinal "a superbly constructed study" (782). What seems problematic to them is the dramatic success of these plays despite "ordinary" characters and "undramatic" subjects in boring plots that critique social issues which the critics never mention.

The underlying problem for these and other editors is more than a real absence of logic and reason in women's dramaturgical construction (for some admit that women do write well and with charm). The problem is rather the perceptions about gender identity which polarise the realms of reason and its definitive opposite, emotion, into two supposedly opposite sexes, combined with social definitions that locate these qualities into two supposedly separate domains: public and private. We can see from the critics' comments that they define women as emotional; they confine her imagination to the private sphere and thus limit her authoritative representations of life experience, and then they label these shortcomings as melodrama. Clark says that women do not approach the "tragic irony", the "poetic and imaginative power" or the "satiric irony" of the great male dramatists and by this he refers to qualities beyond the intellect which come from the realm of life experience--where there is general agreement, as Matthews declared, that women "are likely to have only a definitely limited knowledge of life" (124). In other words, if you as a woman aren't the actual owner of a factory which crushes people, you simply haven't got the authority to write about or criticise the situation in a great dramatic fashion because you "lack the

inexhaustible fund of information about life which is the common property of men" (Matthews 118). Again one might question what inexhaustible experiences of life T.S. Eliot had as a bank clerk. In addition to the criticism of women's limited life experiences when they wrote plays about the public sphere, American critic George Nathan (1941) extends the reason/emotion opposition into a dichotomy by labelling women as naturally melodramatic. In The American Woman Playwright--A View of Criticism and Characterisation, Olauson says that his opinion was that women playwrights were "generically unable to write as well as men" (9) and this explained their secondary status. His three authoritative reasons were that they could not master an economy of emotion, they could not view characters with objectivity, and they could not allow for a dispute of reason. According to Olauson, Nathan's belief was:

> that it was almost impossible for them to present a theme which did not represent a commitment to an absolute right or an absolute wrong ... women writers were incapable of finding a moral middle ground ... Their prejudices were transparent and judgements arbitrary, that being the way, he stated, of 'ingrained melodramatic emotion'. (9)

Where a critic could say the play takes a tough stand on an issue, Nathan perceives women writers as making arbitrary judgements (i.e. emotional and not reasoned). By his oppositional logic they must be generically deficient in reason and, without reason to provide logical economy, women's emotions must be uncontained and excessive, leading to emotional or "arbitrary" judgements that lead to the plays naturally lapsing into melodrama. However, Nathan's criticism that women have "ingrained melodramatic emotion" is not textual but only seems to come from his supposed knowledge of authorial intent. Therefore his unprovable assertion that women playwrights make arbitrary judgements is actually an observation based on his gender assumptions about women.

This perception of women as naturally melodramatic pursued them even when they wrote about subjects which could be

situated in the domestic or emotional realm, where they had not only the constructionists and their subset, the realist critics, to contend with, but also the moralist critics. While the constructionists wrote lavish emotive attacks upon women's dramatic form sprinkled with accusations of melodramatic sentimentality, the realist critics attacked what they perceived as contrived characters or irrational elements in the structurally and psychologically experimental plays of Hallie Flanagan, Jane Bowles, Gertrude Stein or Susan Glaspell; works which offered an alternative to the "well-made" play formula that dominated dramatic realism. As Rachel France notes in her introduction to A Century of Plays by American Women:

> Response to the avant garde, not only of critics but of the general public as well, is rarely favorable at first, even to well-established playwrights. Despite its often dubious results, the tendency has always been to place particular emphasis on the importance of realism in the theatre. (16)

Bowles' play In the Summer House featured "unusual" characters, fantasy scenes to depict a rather suffocating mother/daughter relationship. It was criticised as having its own style, but too little of its own substance, which Olauson says was a "typically negative criticism directed toward many of the followers of the 'new drama'" (162). Olauson argues that Bowles' fiction had characteristics of "subtlety, sensitivity, economy of style, and originality" that "were harmonious with the 'new drama' trend", and where "style took precedence over movement and form" (161-2). Flanagan's style integrated what is now called a cinematic technique, incorporating slides in between rapid scene shifts, while Stein applied innovative and repetitive poetic language to her characters' dialogues. In Gerstenberg's earlier play, Overtones, she used double actresses for the two female characters in order to represent the inner feelings as opposed to what they were saying in the play, an innovative expressionistic technique that concentrated less on proper form and dialogue and focused more on the characterisations both as conscious and subconscious

subjects. With Bowles, Freudian analysis was appropriated to explain the appearance of such characterisations. However, more realistic plays such as Glaspell's The Verge, or Crother's A Man's World, which represented women characters who were nervous and openly disturbed by the confinement of their marriages, were criticised for "contrived" characterisation. Olauson says:

> But Bowles, like other writers who embraced this new dramatic form, was concerned chiefly with establishing her characters from the center of their sub-consciousness. Clurman perceived the technique as a means of getting directly to the primitive impulses of human beings which he described as essentially a poetic approach, as valid as, if less understandable than, the more than rational elements of characterization found in realistic drama. (emphasis mine; 162)

Although Clurman acknowledges the new drama by calling it a valid but less understandable poetic approach, he nevertheless locates these characterisations in an essentialist "primitive" impulse. He and other critics did not consider them as a study of the adverse effects of socially constructed and problematic institutions.

The moralist critics were also constructionist and essentialist in that they argued for Woman's natural superior moral status in society, and demanded plots which reinforced dominant notions of sexual and religious morality. For example, Rosa Franken's Outrageous Fortune, in 1943, sympathetically examined a number of social issues such as "anti-Semitism, homosexuality, marital coldness and other 'erotic vagaries'", according to Rosamund Gilder, a prominent theatre critic. But in an interesting euphemism, she demanded more "internal resolution" because "the playwright had failed to resolve the emotional discords which she had originated with such boldness" and thus the play was defective dramaturgically. In other words, the "resolution" did not punish the homosexual and the harlot so it must be faulty construction again (qtd. in Olauson 14). Another moralist critic, Euphemia Wyatt, also criticised Franken for writing a play where a "harlot ... is held up as a

torchbearer", and that the playwright had "stretched charity to 'a very dangerous scuffing of standards' in offering this mixture of tolerance and sentimentality" (qtd in Olauson 15). Wyatt led other critics in a similar judgement against Lillian Hellman for her references to lesbianism in The Children's Hour saying she "touched upon a subject which 'we have always felt should be taboo'" (qtd. in Olauson 15). Such criticisms, mostly articulated by female critics, did not concern themselves with the plays per se but were more concerned with women's accepted gender definitions which included being the moral guardians of society. Since a major aspect of morality represents the containment of excessive or homosexual sexuality, it seems ironic and illogical to entrust such "emotional" women with being the guardians of morality. But then perhaps they were only represented as such, for the institutions of marriage and church were the actual authoritative vessels of containment. Thus the gender construction of women as emotional creatures bled into the literary criticism of their plays as being deficient in dramatic subjects, plots, logic, reason, realism and morality while characterised by excessive melodrama, sentimentality, and contrived or irrational characters.

Australian drama critic Leslie Rees, discusses these myths about women writers as recently as 1973 in The Making of Australian Drama. He quotes St. John Ervine from 1933 who said that "women are less apt in drama than men and they cannot cope with tragedy" (185), a style which, according to Aristotle, requires the strict containment of emotion in a tight construction. Rees summarises the various reasons he has heard for women's inferiority:

> ... that women are discursive by literary nature and not happy under the iron economy of the stage-play form, that the emotional detachment and appearance of impartiality required of a good playwright in presenting argument is foreign to woman's temperament, that the shock tactics and frankness associated with some aspects of the stage have run counter to woman's need for modesty, that women, as agreed, have had access to the theatre as writers for a shorter time than men. (185)

Since women playwrights have frequently used the one-act play which, Matthews himself admitted, was the perfect form to achieve a unity of action, their mythical inability to write with an "iron economy" should be dispelled. That women writers haven't had access to the theatre "as writers" is a partially inaccurate assumption based on anthological absence and critical disregard, in that there were far more women playwrights than generally known, even in the Restoration era--though it is true women were not granted equal access or production in theatres. As for the shock tactics and frankness of the theatre, the situation may be the reverse in that women's plays suffered many criticisms of moral unconventionality and stylistic irregularity. Although Rees states that, despite these factors, women did write plays of quality in Britain, he does not recognise any great female American dramatists except possibly Lillian Hellman. In relation to Australia, he writes that women were equally talented as men in writing about the public or private spheres, yet he still separates life into masculine and feminine areas:

> Nor could it be said that they worked in separate worlds--that the men playwrights had a monopoly of forthrightness, social-political sense and raw vigour, while the women exhibited only delicacy, feminine frailty and intuitive understanding ... Women writers sometimes treated masculine areas of life without self-consciousness or affectation, as Katharine Susannah Prichard and Henrietta Drake-Brockman did; while some men writers probed sensitively into the nerve-centres of the feminine psyche ... Both sexes regarded the whole of life as their oyster. (186)

Sounding a hopeful note for women playwrights however, Matthews said that though the lack of worldly experience and a deficient faculty of construction were disabilities, things could improve:

> The first of these disabilities may tend to disappear if ever the feminist movement shall achieve its ultimate victory; and the second may depart also whenever women submit themselves to the severe discipline which has compelled men to be more or less logical. (emphasis mine; 125)

Although he does not admit that there are any problems with

masculinist interpretations and gender biased criticisms of women's plays, he does concede, in his inimitable style, that gender is a social construction.

In summary, the representation of women's identity in the critical discourse of drama anthologies reveals that the qualities attributed to women's gender have been linked with criticism of their plays, such that in various ways their plays are regarded as "women's" plays, (domestic, emotional, trivial, sentimental, etc.) and therefore concerned with issues that are of interest only to women. In their interpretation of plays by women, critics have emphasised the domestic themes as central and then deemed them undramatic; they have called the characters dull, ordinary, or contrived and then evaluated them on the basis of realism and moralism. This extreme focus on women's identity has clouded the texts of editors and critics who have overlooked or ignored certain social themes like poverty, prostitution, economics, gender, or class. In particular they seem to ignore the contradictions which are highlighted when the plays represent problems for women and men related to traditional gender definitions and associated social institutions like marriage. Critics have identified women writers as being naturally melodramatic and therefore incapable of sufficient rationality to be objective. They have criticised women's lack of adherence to the well-made three-act play and blamed this on women's natural lack of logic, and they cite historical absence as proof against women's writing ability. The major problem of superimposing gender onto literary criticism is twofold: women's gender qualities do not fit in with standard notions of good dramatic writing, and the various themes they represent which might be unfamiliar, contradictory or socially unacceptable <u>for their sex</u> are overlooked and not taken seriously.

Between the text and the critical evaluation, is the demand for authoritative--meaning experiential--representations of subjects centered around masculinist experiences of the world that confirm the traditional

definitions of gender. If women writers do not adhere to the literary and social codes of this unspoken demand but are also successful, this could be seen as a threat to the dominance of male writers--and their representations--in the theatre. As we have seen from the comments regarding women playwrights, the critics prefer (following the Aristotelian tradition) that playwrights represent great crises, noble passions and important characters, yet with emotions contained by the three-act mathematical construction, so as not to lapse into melodramatic sentimentality.[6] This turns out to be anything that is written by women and thus perceived as domestic, since by 'natural' definition they belong to the private realm of experience. When women playwrights were becoming too prominent in the United States in the 1930s, the New York critic, Whitney Bolton, said theatre was becoming "feminised" which was bad because women playwrights were "transforming male characters into 'pallid shadows' for the stronger women characters ... present[ing] women in dominant roles while men ... served merely as puppets" (qtd. in Olauson 8). According to Olauson:

> Bolton contended that an unprecedented reversal had happened: the male qualities of strength, decision, firmness, and control had been seized by women and were out of place in their hands" (emphasis mine; 9)

Women playwrights were challenging the feminine gender myths simultaneously in several ways. They crossed gender boundaries by the obvious exercise of reason in order to do playwrighting, they produced critical social commentaries through plays that represented subjects outside of the domestic experience, and they portrayed characters who also displaced gender qualities. This was a double exposure of the myth that these so-called male qualities were simply available only to men but, as I have shown, these issues were overlooked and ignored by the critics.

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[6] Sentimentality is defined by the Macquarie Dictionary as weakly emotional, while sentiment itself is defined as a mental feeling or thought influenced by or proceeding from feeling or emotion.

What then is the price of this writing and of this critical exclusion? Gerald Rabkin writes in The Politics of the American Theatre of the Thirties, that some plays produced by the Federal Theatre Project under the leadership of Hallie Flanagan were so controversial that they were stopped by more than negative reviews by critics. Flanagan's play, Can You Hear Their Voices, confronted government exploitation of starving farmers during the Depression. In this play an educated daughter of a Congressman disrupts her debutante ball in the face of national poverty, attacking her father for doing nothing to help the farmers; in a bitter dispute with her father about ladyhood, he condemns university teachers as people who can't earn very much money. This was an example of the Project's work "which affirmed the necessity of facing social issues, but which avoided a dogmatically consistent political position upon these issues" (Rabkin 102-3). Although the project had its own autonomy whereby workers' theatre and black units developed on their own, Hallie Flanagan was considered to have a "'subversive' penchant for theatrical experimentation" (102). While Flanagan sent out letters insisting that the Federal Theatre did not adopt any one viewpoint "beyond presenting a new and vital drama of our times, emerging from the social and economic forces of the day," she was still called to answer charges of Communism before the Senate Committee (102). The Federal Project was stopped by an Act of Congress ostensibly due to economic reasons, but Rabkin argues:

> All the Arts projects used less than three-fourths of one per cent of the total WPA appropriation, and the appropriation was not cut one cent by the termination of the Federal Theatre; the money was simply distributed among other WPA projects. (121)

The calibre of the attack on Flanagan and the Project is clearly illustrated from the transcript of her interview:

> Congressman Starnes: (quoting from Hallie Flanagan's book, A Theatre is Born) 'the workers' theatres ... intend to remake a social structure without the help of money and this ambition alone invests their undertaking with a certain Marlowesque madness.'
> You are quoting from this Marlowe. Is he a Communist?
> Flanagan: I am very sorry. I was quoting from

> Christopher Marlowe.
> Starnes: Tell us who Marlowe is, so we can get the proper reference, because that is all we want to do.
> H.F.: Put in the record that he was the greatest dramatist in the period of Shakespeare, immediately preceding Shakespeare.
> Starnes: Put that in the record, because the charge has been made that this article of yours is entirely Communistic, and we want to help you. Of course we had what some people call Communists back in the days of the Greek theatre. I believe Mr. Euripides was guilty of teaching class-consciousness also, wasn't he?
> H.F.: I believe that was alleged against all of the Greek dramatists.
> Starnes: So we cannot say when it began. (122)

As Rabkin discusses, implicit in the demise of the Project is the moralist critical notion that "art, in puritan eyes, is eternally suspect, eternally an instrument of the devil" while the plays were accused of being vulgar and profane. (122). An individual play could be critically dealt with, but a collective project with money behind it required the intervention of the United States Government for its elimination.

Bolton directly implied the power of critical analysis to affect successful women playwrights of the 30s when he threatened that "the vogue would not last nor would it continue for ... few contemporary women playwrights were '<u>powerful</u> and <u>flawless</u> and <u>strong</u> enough to <u>make the plays stick</u>'" (emphasis mine; qtd. in Olauson 9). In other words, they could be stopped by a continued critical reception that rigorously demanded flawless adherence to a great drama tradition based on essentialist, structuralist, and gender biased standards. However, the methodology of ensuring that plays do not "stick" also relates to the overall process of textual production. In this process, the erasure of women playwrights is achieved through gender biased critical practices whereby sustained negative reception coupled with anthological and institutional exclusion, amounts to what is really nonreception and thus dominance in discourse. The most obvious contradiction to the logic of "sticking" are the few plays by women that won very distinguished awards, as presumably these plays did fulfill dramatic standards, and

one would expect to find them reproduced in anthologies. Since they are not, it is therefore reasonable to ask why aren't women who have won the Pulitzer Prize or the Australian Playwright's Advisory Board award more widely known for historical or intrinsic greatness? Why haven't their plays "stuck"? In the following pages I will examine the reception of these plays whose erasure indicates an even more startling degree of nonreception; where critical authorities have excluded the plays of women even when they manage to win prominent and distinguished awards, exposing dominance as an exclusionary move beyond the support of accepted institutional standards.

In Australia, several winners of the Playwright's Advisory Board Competition from 1945 to 1960 remain unpublished; Marien Dreyer's Wish No More (1960), Lynn Foster's And The Moon Will Shine (1946) and Dorothy Blewett's The First Joanna (1947). Catherine Duncan's Sons of Morning (1945) was published by Mulga Press in 1946. However, Oriel Gray's The Torrents (1954), which shared first prize with Ray Lawler's Summer of the Seventeenth Doll, remained unpublished until 1988. Leslie Rees tries to explain why so little had been heard of this play:

> At the outset, the Trust had shown no enthusiasm for backing a full professional production, in fact had refused to do so. When minor presentation was mooted, the sensitivities and doubts of the author were a factor in delay. Naturally enough, comparisons with The Doll would be made, and if these were based on a theatrical showing that was inept, or only fair, the damage to amour propre and name might be unpleasant. Several offers from smaller groups were refused and apart from an A.B.C. radio performance, The Torrents was not available for public assessment until a considerable time had passed. (Making 272)

Torrents represents a woman who gets a job at a newspaper by using only her first initials and surname on the applicatioin; and of course upon arrival the deception is revealed and she must deal with open hostility and resentment of her sex. While Rees at least recognises that this play attempts to confront the human relationship problems in "the age of the 'new' woman" he stereotypically describes the lead

character Jenny as "a sturdy but entirely feminine representative, determined on her right to earn a living in a man's way" (Making 272). The play also revolves around a major problem for the Torrent family newspaper, which is whether or not to support the new irrigation schemes of a "young idealist who believes the day of gold is nearly over" with the future based on "conquering the dry spells and harnessing the torrents" (Making 272). Jenny plays a major role in advancing his radical ideas by substituting a conservative article written by the father for a leading one written as an exercise by the son. Like plays from the Suffragette era and the 30s, Torrents gives a textual representation of a woman who argues not only for equality in an unchanged world, but rather the opportunity to change society, but Rees did acknowledge Jenny's role:

> In the process she proves her own capability as a forward force, with her dream of working for the world, 'not to perish but to work for it, not to weep for it but to change it! That takes a man--or a woman'. (Making 273)

None of the reviewers saw a thematic link associating the future of the new woman with a new era of irrigation, and most only saw the story as it related to the men. Kevon Kemp reviewed The Torrents eight years after it won the PAB award and commented that it hadn't had anything like the success of the Doll, "nor one may make bold to say, will it" (Bulletin, 18 August 1962, p 36). Kemp admits that the Doll underwent so much rewriting that one of the judges hardly recognised the play when he saw it, but he pins the main difference between the two plays on theme, which for Kemp means missing several themes in Torrents. He argues that "at the least, The Doll had a central notion that was at the same time topical and universal" but the "strong story line" of Torrents has "little in the way of a fundamental idea--except the statement that men with money sometimes tend to oppose moves that will deprive them of their money" (36). He entirely dismisses the subject of women entering the public sphere--to change it--calling the female lead as "a Sylvia Pankhurst type female reporter" (36). He finishes up by

saying there was an "unnecessary solution of all plot details" which contradicts the usual notion of plot resolution for great drama (36). The other published PAB winner was Duncan's verse play, Sons of the Morning, an allegorical representation of war based on Gallipoli which questioned the heroics of self-sacrifice. One reviewer, Allan Ashbolt, had this to say:

> Miss Duncan's arid, pedantic, generally ten-syllable iambic jingle and the inanimate bores who speak it bear no relation either to Aristotelian demands for tragedy or the awful evacuation of Crete which purports to be her subject. If Miss Duncan had written in straightforward, down-to-earth, literate prose she might, too, have constructed the play with a little more theatrical craftsmanship. (Focus, Dec-Jan, 1946-7, p 32)

Again, the peasants who play a prominent part in the play are referred to as "inanimate bores" (32) and the verse construction of the play is attacked, (though it reads very much like prose) while the representation of the politics of war remains undiscussed.

In America the Pulitzer prize is the highest honour, though none of the plays by women which won the award are to be found in modern drama anthologies. The award brings a wide recognition to the playwright and winning the Pulitzer is said to:

> ... tickle the pride and fill the wallet ... often sells 25,000 copies of a novel or 1,000 of a volume of verse; will jam a theatre with customers.... (Newsweek, 18 May 1935, p 25)

In this context I would like to examine the critical reception of a few American women who have won the coveted prize. In this Newsweek editorial entitled "Pulitzer Awards: The Prizes Arouse the Usual Yearly Furor", it is reported that critics were questioning why Akins' The Old Maid won. Veteran drama critic, Clayton Hamilton, "fumed at the choice" because the play was adapted from Edith Wharton's novel and therefore was not original (25). However, Miss Akins "refreshed his memory" by reminding him that he had voted in 1930 for Marc Connelly's play which was taken from a story by Mr. Roark Bradford (25). The Old Maid represents the

conflicts of a woman who wants to retain her career as a childcare provider for poor working women, but is forbidden by her future husband to work. It is a double dilemma in that this is her only access to her illegitimate child which she has anonymously entrusted to the care of her former black nanny. In the introduction to this play from Best Plays of 1934-35, Burns Mantle says the critics were against the play with their rightful charge that "this drama of maternal yearning and mother love is definitely sentimental" though he also says enthusiastic supporters are "equally right in insisting that it is a human and substantial drama, skillfully and intelligently adapted" (145). It was labelled a great woman's play and a sure matinee attraction with women "dragging a small percentage of their menfolk with them" (144). In Theatre Arts Monthly, Edith Isaacs said the play "sentimentalized the plight of a woman, lonely and growing old, who dares not claim as her own the illegitimate child that she loves" (19 March 1935, p 176). In my contemporary reading of the play I saw none of the stylistics that typified the excessive sentimentality of melodramatic theatre as a style. However there was a substantial amount of dialogue that involved cutting attacks on the restrictions of women in and out of marriage. As for motherly yearning, it was effaced by the strict anonymity agreed upon and maintained when the protagonist gives the child to her wealthier cousin to raise with "married" respectability. In the American Mercury, critic J. Nathan directly attacked Akins saying that she was an example of "what affectation can do to a real talent" and further (118):

> While it is no part of a critic's business to venture beyond a playwright's work into the playwright personally, there is one such critic who can't help believing that Miss Akins dramatizes not her elegant characters so much as her own elegant aspirations and ambitions. She seems to be suffering from a suppressed desire to have a butler. (May 1928, p 119)

Glaspell's play Alison's House won the Pulitzer in 1930 and in a rare moment of praise Barrett Clark predicted in Drama magazine that it would outlast several Pulitzer Prize

winners, though he said it was "very little besides a study in character" (January 1931, p 13). In this play, based on the life of Emily Dickinson, Glaspell examines the issue of national versus family ownership of a writer's manuscripts; specifically, love poems discovered after the death of a poet and the conflict this caused between family members trying to preserve the work and those trying to destroy them in the interest of protecting the family's reputation. Clark reports that most reviewers criticised it for being too "literary" and he admits it could be improved by cutting out unnecessary repetition "and in spots a little too much 'fine' writing", but overall he praises it for its unity of theme and universality of "certain problems of living" (14). A review called "A Delicate Matter" in the New Statesman was not so generous, and said that "it was impossible to be interested in the conventions of a past age unless they are exhibited as the background of real people" (22 October 1932, p 483). The realist criticism was pushed further in Theatre Arts Monthly, where John Hutchens ignored the usual demand for unity complaining that "even more thoroughly dominated by one unrelieved and highly abstract idea is the play which has brought Miss Glaspell back to the theatre" which "sensibly, for the sake of contrast ... is grounded in reality, set in the sturdy background of a house of half a century ago" (February 1931, 101-102). Though he characterises Glaspell as coming "baffingly near to realisation" of a "far, high goal" and admits moments of perception and even brilliance, he too calls it a "literary play" which is too lacking in "tactile points of narrative" (102).

In Judith Louise Stephens' article called "Women in Pulitzer Prize Plays, 1918-1949", she does an interesting character analysis on representations of women in such plays. In her study of these characters she looks for traits associated with women in fiction such as 1) a preoccupation with love; 2) irrationality and emotionality; 3) selfishness or selflessness; and 4) passivity. She notes the following:

> In considering the four literary traits, then, the female dramatic characters conform to one on an

> unqualified basis: most tend to be preoccupied with love. The characters conform to two of the traits on a qualified basis: most tend to be emotional but not necessarily irrational, and most are, in certain respects, passive. Although there are some examples of the Eve-Mary Syndrome, the female dramatic characters do not tend to conform to this one trait. (Women in American Theatre 249)

It is likely that the dominance of these characteristics might explain some of the difficult reception and eventual erasure of plays by women that won the Pulitzer prize, but offered broader female characterisations. She also points out that:

> In comparing the women characters in one decade to the others, it appears that the women in the plays of the first decade (1918-29) possess a stability, independence, and strength not generally found in the later decades. Out of the eleven plays studied for the first decade, all but three have a female protagonist. (249)

Perhaps the first wave of feminism did have an impact on representations for women in this decade, however:

> Chances of the female character's having the status of protagonist tended to decrease after the first decade (1918-29). This suggests that the central female characters in the Pulitzer Prize plays, 1918-49, have generally received limited development, which accords with the assumptions that women are primarily interested in love, are emotional, and are passive. (251)

By looking at the critical "reception" of these few award winners, it is apparent that not only traditional dramatic definitions, but personal prejudices regarding gender, were operating through critics whose reviews set the stage for their exclusion from anthologies of great drama--even though this was their likely destination since they had been considered great enough for exceptional dramatic awards. One can only speculate as to how they managed to win even a few awards; perhaps the members of the committees were not "professional" drama critics and therefore reacted more favourably as did audiences, or perhaps the awards represented a type of compensation for the lack of recognition afforded to women playwrights. Nevertheless, the awards were not enough to ensure publication, nor

performance, and certainly not the "sticking" of anthological inclusion. However, the important underlying assumption to be questioned and examined in the dramatic discourse is not simply that men are the good playwrights because men are logical and women are emotional, but the belief system that reason as part of the writing process can and should be entirely separate from feelings and emotion. (In Part Two, I will go on to look in greater detail at the historical tenets of great dramatic form, to evaluate the philosophical construction of gender biased criticism in the evaluation of plays by women.)

Modern Erasure

This next section will examine modern erasure by reading contemporary critical responses to more recent successful plays by women, as well as by considering problems of production for women playwrights. Here the "nonreception" of critics continues to show how the historical construction of the great drama genre depends upon an interrelationship between literary standards and social gender definitions, and that these essentialist, structuralist, realist, moralist, and gender biased standards continue to impinge upon contemporary women playwrights. Additionally, the historical representation of plays by women as "women's" plays now becomes linked with the feminist movement, providing another location for attacking women's writing as prescriptive, full of uncontrolled rage, and really better dealt with by the feminists.

Olauson laments that, despite the fact that modern American playwrights such as Adrienne Kennedy, Megan Terry, Rosalyn Drexler, Rochelle Owens and Myrna Lamb have:

> written at least one play which has maintained a substantial audience on a New York stage over a considerable length of time ... it is surprising that so little attention has been paid to them, how little serious analysis, or even tribute, they have received. According to some contemporary women playwrights, women's works have often been met with biased criticism, unswerving traditionalism, lack of encouragement, and even total disregard. (American 7)

This may not seem so surprising in that the critical

methodology of structural dominance used earlier in the century can be traced in its evolution by looking at a few reviews of contemporary award-winning plays from 1964-1984, as well as those of recent plays from a few better known modern women playwrights. In 1964, Adrienne Kennedy won the Obie award of Distinguished Play for Funnyhouse of a Negro, which represents the last hours of a young black girl before she commits suicide. Howard Taubman of the New York Times commented on the play's structure:

> By the standards of routine drama, the work ... is much less a play than a vividly illustrated short story. Nothing happens much except that the nightmares of the girl, Sarah, are partly visualized, and the figures that haunt her days and nights take form and give expression to her secret resentments and guilt. (15 January 1964, p 25)

The fact that Jesus, Queen Victoria and the Duchess of Hapsburg are some of Sarah's visualisations is mentioned only later when they are referred to as ghosts also "tormented by revealingly kinky hair"; instead of a discussion on the obvious theme of the colonisation of black people's culture by white authority figures, Taubman reverses the situation by calling them "her secret resentments and guilt" (25). He goes on to grant some believability to this work as "Miss Kennedy, herself a Negro, digs unsparingly into Sarah's aching psyche", but dismisses the pain represented by saying that Sarah "is in extremis in her suffering, and it may even be suggested that her visions are those of one who is deranged" (emphasis mine; 25). Almost as an afterthought, he then says "But one cannot doubt that in her intensity she reflects what it is to be a sensitive Negro", no doubt hoping that most blacks are not sensitive, as he "recalls Countee Cullen's ironic line about how curious it is that God should make a poet black and let him sing. Only Sarah laments" (emphasis mine; 25). Edith Oliver's review in the New Yorker also follows the usual pattern of structural criticism combined with accusations of excessive emotionality:

> It is hard to separate the facts about the girl from the fancies, since most of the evidence about her is her own, and she is in no shape to give it. Much of

> the play consists of her raging, haunted monologue, from which we can at least tell that she once wanted to be a poet.... (25 January 1964, p 76)

After describing the wild set she decides to label the play "an Expressionistic attempt to reproduce the girl's madness and anguish", before finally collapsing into a critique of the content as uninteresting:

> I don't take to Expressionism, partly because its built-in weirdness and distortion tend to make the material it deals with seem more important than it really is. The material here couldn't be much more important to begin with, so that's all right, I guess, and the style does seem appropriate. (emphasis added; 76)

Here one sees the subjective position of the critic asserting what is "really" important, overlaying her structuralist criticism of "weirdness" in style onto her rascist interpretation that what the black girl says couldn't be important anyway.

That year Rosalyn Drexler also won the same Obie for her play Home Movies, which was described by Henry Hewes in The Best Plays of 1964-65 as "the carryings-on of a lot of strange people" with a "patchwork of blasphemy and kooky quality" (qtd. in Olauson 115). But Olauson argues that this play purposely "consist[s] of a series of farcical interludes by which the playwright satirizes surface morals, manners, and customs, and the false behavior of the people who create them" (116). While most critics refused to treat this and other avant-garde work of women playwrights seriously, in Richard Gilman's introduction to Drexler's book The Line of Least Existence and Other Plays, he has offered a reading of her work that does not assume female mindlessness regarding the rules of conventional theatre. About her characters who are "armed to the teeth with language", he says they "make up new worlds of farce whose highly serious intention, as in all true examples of the genre, is to liberate us from the way things are said to be" (xi); and as for plot, "dénouements, after all, are for plays which progress from a question to an answer, whereas Drexler's is exactly the other way around" (xi). Perhaps foreshadowing or coinciding with

poststructuralist concepts, he further states that:

> Imagination equals style equals play; until we learn that this is so, we are going to go on hunting like demented ferrets for the truth underneath the surfaces of the plays we see ... and never experiencing what is there to be experienced. (ix)

In 1967, Rochelle Owens won the Obie Award of Distinguished Play for Futz, which represents the violence of an American rural community when a farmer has sexual relations with his pig, Amanda. Futz is hounded for his actions by the village whore, Marjorie, who sends her male family members to seek vengeance; another villager who observes Futz commits a sex murder on a young girl; but ultimately it is Futz who is seen as the instigator of violence in the community and while in jail he is killed. Olauson says that some critics defended Futz as the non-conforming individual, but John Simon argued "her ideas, characters and even language were not dramatically legitimate, nor were they 'couched in a dramatic event'" (emphasis mine; 124). The illegitimacy of these characters is that they are not capable of being classified as 'good'. Walter Kerr of The New York Times called Owens' work a "fiasco" and uses every standard structuralist and gender-biased criticism against it:

> I am scandalized that such slovenliness should be permitted to masquerade as new art ... The play's structure--if one may use such a conventional term in these outlands--is aimlessly disproportioned ... the issue is hypothetical, undramatized, ungraphic, without immediacy ... it seems remarkably sentimental ... Probably Miss Owens' play is an unimportant one in any case. (30 June 1968, Sec 2, p 1)

Again we have the usual critique of structure, and the familiar accusation of sentimentality overlaying the subjective critic's interpretation of the play as unimportant.

In London, Sharman McDonald won the London Standard Drama Award for Best Play of 1984 with When I Was A Girl, I Used To Scream And Shout. Michael Billington of the Guardian said "the worst thing about it is its title which itself screams to be cut" while Michael Coveney of the Financial Times said the title "is not only too long but also too suggestive of

the girlish Victorian reminiscences of E. Nesbit" (London Theatre Record 5-18 November 1984, p 1028). Title aside, most male critics labelled it as concerning mother-daughter relationships and resentment, with Billington hinting at "the complexity of female sexuality" (London 1028). In an interview with Diana Hinds for Books and Bookmen, the author said, "the idea for the play came from seeing a view of female sexuality put forward--by a man--that made me very angry" (June 1986, p 29). One female critic from Time Out, Ann McFerran, said the play "recounts with sympathy and a deliciously rude detail, the sexual misadventures and misconceptions of Fiona, growing up with her repressive mother ... in fifties Scotland" (London 1028), while Ros Asquith in City Limits said that:

> this gently unassuming play says much about the constraints of conventional sexuality, in addition to taking in the tyranny of teenagers over their parents and the veiled resentment felt by women who've buckled down dutifully to those who have not. (London 1033)

While McFerran praised McDonald for her refreshing candour, noting that these "tell-all reminiscences" are usually the "stuff of semi-autobiographical women's novels" (London 1028), John Barber of the Daily Telegraph was unimpressed with the audience response to this display of female sexuality:

> Judging from the delighted sniggers from women in the audience, they found something peculiarly satisfying in so much talk about menstruation, masturbation, pubertal body changes, the details of impregnation ... and soon, the situation when sex games are overtaken by the real thing. (emphasis mine; London 1033)

Here Barber rather crudely denies that female sexuality on its own can even be seen as "the real thing", implying that the normative description of sexuality as male-defined requires the presence of a penis. A litany of familiar criticisms emerges from the reviewers (all quotes from London Theatre Record) such as:

> The play is by its nature a bit hermetic and remorselessly concerned with private lives ... I would like to see her tackle wider social themes. (Billington 1028); The writing is not so much feminist as intriguingly feminine. (Coveney 1033); I salute the

> verisimilitude but not the self-pity in the new author's study of adolescent distress and more mature pain. (Barber 1033)

One critic blatantly refers to gendered writing while the playwright is condemned for writing about the personal sphere and asked to address "wider" social themes; yet women playwrights are relentlessly attacked for their lack of authority when writing about the public sphere. Finally, Asquith's review in the Observer perceived a more "contemporary edge" from McDonald's setting, but then refers to the rigidity of the dramatic unities where the setting must not mix public and private realms:

> As for the fact that a nuclear reactor now threatens the shoreline that Fiona once played on, it is something that the author notes in passing and is the kind of device critics are supposed to dislike in plays of domestic values. (London 1028)

Michael Coveney exemplifies this typical critical dislike in his comment about the reactor:

> The contrast between best friends' fates nearly leads to a disastrous, analagous spiel about nuclear reactors, but Ms MacDonald's instincts are strong enough to rear back to what she writes best about: the pain of people who love each other and expect too much. (emphasis mine; London 1033)

That a woman playwright might be asked simultaneously to write about wider social issues but then again remain writing about what she must know best--the 'narrower' issues of domesticity and love--entails a catch-22 still maintained in the literary standards for women writers that involves several outdated assumptions. Firstly, that domesticity and love are are not 'wider issues' or that they are entirely separate from them, and secondly, that writing needs to be about 'wider' social issues in order to be classified as great. However, the contradiction is that when women playwrights do represent the connections between personal situations as interrelated with 'larger' socio-political issues, these themes will be ignored, the domestic will be highlighted and trivialised, while the authors will be criticised as lacking experiential authority. It is precisely the standards that prescribe the authority to write

combined with the privileging of certain experiences which need questioning, as MacDonald says in her interview, "people round here are talking about writing--about areas of life that haven't been written down before. And if my small success has contributed to that movement, I'm pleased" (qtd. in Hinds 29).

Megan Terry won the Obie Award for Best Play of 1970 for Approaching Simone, a biographical drama about the French writer Simone Weil, who starved herself to death in 1943 at the age of 34. Keyssar notes in Feminist Theatre that the focus on one transcendent woman is unusual in Terry's works, but argues that Terry's goal this time was to "place Simone's heroic spirit, her enormous will, in front of other women: 'Then people will say, "My God, it is possible; women are free to do this and can"' (Terry qtd in Keyssar 70). In Simone Terry did employ her technique of transformational drama with the cast repeatedly changing into various characters from Simone's life, but while her other work is usually criticised as superficial or confusing, Simone met with critical appreciation. The most likely explanation is that the play was perceived as a return to more dramatically conventional writing. I quote Arthur Sainer from Contemporary Dramatists in full:

> And we come to Approaching Simone, and a breakthrough for Terry. For in this tribute to the life of the French philospher, Simone Weil, Terry finally confronts a private life which is tremulously charged with character. Weil is constantly challenging herself, looking into her life, tearing at herself in the fight to become a better, more responsible being. Here is no victim but an existential heroine who is making her life through moral and intellectual bravery, through harrowing insights she refuses not to see. She wants to see deeper and in seeing deeper use her life for the good of humanity. And appropriately, the play slows down the quivering business that is so much a part of Terry's earlier work, slows down significantly. For she is looking in a breathing life, not a symbol, into a courageous being, not a victim, and the richness of this challenging being demands a new measure of tranquility. (emphasis mine; 755)

Another obviously pleasing factor was the publicly heroic quality of the central character's life, which exposes the

common critical perception of the other characters in Terry's plays--angry mothers, lower class prostitutes, and senile, rebellious old ladies--as "victims".

The Pulitzer Prize had not been awarded to a woman playwright for twenty-three years (Ketti Frings received it for her play Look Homeward, Angel in 1958) until Beth Henley finally won the distinguished prize for her play Crimes of the Heart, and she was followed by Marsha Norman in 1983 who won the award for 'night Mother. Crimes depicts the relationship of three daughters who are reunited in their family house when one of the sisters gets in trouble for shooting her husband. Mother represents a daughter who is tired of her life and plans to commit suicide that evening after she informs her mother and finishes up last minute details. Jill Dolan's essay in Making a Spectacle (1989) examines the critical reception of these plays with respect to the Prize and canonisation, arguing that some critics "attempted to obscure Norman's gender under an Aristotelian mantle of respectability. Other writers ... made her gender an issue" (335). Though Norman's play and subsequent movie was "contextualised as 'art'" (326), Henley's play was not reviewed as making a universal statement and both play and film were promoted as entertainment; a regional comedy that distanced the real desperation of the sisters with their eccentric antics of comic relief. Even though both plays deal with problematic female lives and suicide, Dolan suggests that the classification of Crimes as a comedy and Mother as either a classic Aristotelian tragedy or melodramatic kitchen drama, may explain why critics grappled with the canonisation of Norman's play, but not Henley's. Apparently the critical argument revolved around the criterion of universality, and the ambivalence of male critics "about the gender subtext and their comparison of the play to canonical standards" (328). Dolan points out that while Arthur Miller's plays are generally classified as domestic drama "in that they deal with family issues in which father/son relationships are privileged" (333), Mother can

also be seen as domestic drama though this "assumes different connotations when the writer is a woman and the mother/daughter confict is foregrounded" (333). Dolan chronicles the reception of Jessie's mother, Thelma, who is referred to as "the 'fuddled mother', 'scatterbrained but decent', 'not too bright', a 'fussy, silly woman with a frumpy wardrobe and an insatiable sweet tooth' and a 'lonely flibbertigibbet of a vacant mother'" (328) with Robert Asahina saying:

> Thelma is not so quietly deranged ... prattling on inanely about hot chocolate, knitting, television and a host of lowbrow concerns with which Norman has burdened her in order to let the audience know that this is a drama about Real People. (qtd. in Dolan 328)

Reviewers' responses alternated between praising the play "for its 'moral inquiry' and trivialising its 'domestic cliché'" (333); others saw the play "as 'suspense melodrama' or 'resolutely domestic'" and Dolan concludes:

> In the change from male writer to female and father/son focus to mother/daughter, domestic drama is reduced to kitchen drama, which is considered specific rather than universal, and melodramatic rather than tragic. (333)

Dolan presents the argument of Robert Brustein, director of the American Repertory Theatre, who wrote that Mother did pass the universality test because "Mother is 'chastely classical (emphasis Dolan's) in its observance of the unities', particularly time, which is measured synchronously onstage and in the audience" (334), with Brustein saying further that:

> this helps explain the enduring strength and validity of the Poetics ... Nothing reinforces one's faith in the power and importance of the theatre more than the emergence of an authentic, universal playwright--not a woman playwright, mind you, not a regional playwright, not an ethnic playwright, but one who speaks to the concerns and experiences of all humankind. (335)

The standard definition of universality as "that which can apply to the whole" (Macquarie Dictionary, p 1896) renders the concept of universal tragedy impossible as the classic definition of tragedy is that which happens to great or noble

people, who fall because of a tragic, fatal flaw, and whose suffering is somehow more meaningful than that of the masses. While the structure and "unities" of Norman's play may confer some aspect of universality according to Aristotle, as Dolan rightly points out:

> For 'night, Mother to be a tragedy according to the dominant culture's criteria, Jessie should have been played by a performer with the body size and appearance of Farrah Fawcett. The death by choice of an unsuccessful, homely, overweight woman is considered melodrama because its implications do not resonate enough to be considered tragedy by the generic male spectator. (332)

Although in Norman's text Jessie is an ordinary woman who is flawed by epilepsy and has lost her job, her husband, and her juvenile delinquent son; critics concentrated on describing the actress who played Jessie as being unattractive and overweight, and thus "the production's received flaw, which provides the cause of Jessie's ultimate demise, is fat" (emphasis mine; 329). Dolan notes that Douglas Watts, the Daily News reviewer, belittles the individual character:

> the troubling aspect of the play is that Jessie is not a truly tragic figure. Her self containment as she busily sets things in order about the house suggests one dedicated to her awful purpose, true, but also suggests a congenitally deranged woman. (emphasis mine; 334)

The strategic work of the play which questions the social construction of such female gender roles, via the representation of an individual who manifests contradictory side-effects, is ignored through continual critical reference to the person rather than her social situation. As Alan Wallach in Newsday describes it, "there is no awkward stretch for imagery or universality ... [the play] doesn't develop to reveal a deeper truth" (qtd. in Dolan 334). Variety is quoted as having "called 'night Mother a 'non-box office subject'" that:

> lacks universal application ... There's pity but no terror, no purgative release for the audience. The heroine's action, as the author no doubt intended, remains a private, isolated instance of human failure. The audience isn't a partner. (emphasis mine; qtd. in Dolan 334)

One can only ask: what audience? The analysis is always revolving around the play's representation within the context of a dramatic standard, and if it--the play--cannot meet the criteria for universality, then the problem of the heroine is "hereditary and therefore individual" (Watts qtd. in Dolan 334). The play is consequently depoliticised and the audience can be dismissed from entertaining thoughts of social responsibility. Dolan's essay explores the issue of dominant great drama standards with respect to mainstream canonisation and the feminist canon, and I will discuss this argument further when examining methodologies of feminist literary criticism.

The reviews of other well-known contemporary women playwrights also follow the typical pattern of structuralist and gender-biased critical reception. Dorothy Hewett would have to be one of Australia's most famous female playwrights, and her play The Chapel Perilous, first produced in Perth in 1969, caused "vehement divisions of emotional reaction and opinion" according to Leslie Rees in his chapter on "Female Sexuality and Self-Assertion" from A History of Australian Drama. He says this was not because it was written by a woman but rather:

> for the first time it attempted to project, in a kind of leapfrogging dualism, both the lively sexuality and the social idealism of a woman born without any fear at all of formerly rigid restrictions on conduct and explicit statement. (History 147)

The lead character, Sally Banner, is called a rebel at school for not bowing down at the altar, a slut for trying out sex with boys, and punished for her lesbian affair which the headmistress breaks up. The style of the play is a series of shorter scenes in prose or verse, documenting key moments in Sally's personal life along with contemporary world history, as she is tried by various authority figures--father, canon, headmistress, and Communist Party. Rees surveys some of the critical reactions to this play by asking:

> Is it all so much personal feminine display, a hectic nostalgia of pain and pleasure, an emotional-histrionic splurge, emotion recollected in continuing turmoil, a stew of lyrical feeling boiled in words, a

> paean of abandonment of any restricting disciplines, a too individual philosophic romp not serving but using social-political crusades to its own self-indulgent ends? (148).

He looks at some responses from "persons who ought to know a play when they see one" (148), including that of Romola Constantino, a critic for the Sydney Morning Herald:

> the paper which in Sydney has traditionally been the intelligent playgoer's guide found Sally Banner 'a monumental bore ... The vision of Sally, for me, was nearer to The Perils of Pauline or Sally Banner, her Life and Loves, in a permissive edition'. (148)

Rees also includes Patrick White's defense of Chapel who:

> wrote to the Herald that it was 'for all its incidental, but relevant, crudity, a very subtle, thoughtful play ... an introspective theme brilliantly externalised as theatre by the author and director ... a work of art universal in its appeal, and it is fitting that it should make its Sydney appearance in that Cathedral Perilous at Bennelong'. (148)

Thematic criticism remained close to the personal and, quoting D.H. Lawrence from the play, he argues that even though: "the play was about a girl who says at the outset: 'I believe strongly in the blood, the flesh, as being wiser than the intellect', and 'all I want is to answer to my blood direct'"; she is not "merely a child of hot impulse" since she "also looks to the hope of socialistic liberation and peace" (emphasis mine; 147). His assumption, of course, is that female sexuality unbound from intellect (or male-defined institutions) is "hot impulse" and further, that what elevates Sally Banner is her intellectual idealism. He thinks the play is memorable for dismantling the assumption by playwrights that "a woman has to be either profane or sacred, but never both", and for illustrating that a "rich and exploring sexuality in a woman is not inconsistent with a reforming intellectual idealism in respect of the moral-social state of the world and its people" (148-9). Basically he still maintains the duality of definitions such as profane and sacred but merely says it is now dramatically correct for women to be both within the same play. Regarding this duality he notes that "a wise commentator" namely Sylvia Lawson, "has summed up this situation aptly--and how much

better that a woman, rather than a man, should do so" (149). Lawson begins by quoting from The Female Eunuch concerning the "element of quest in her sexuality which the female is taught to deny" then says (149):

> It is exactly this that Sally will not deny, just as in the school chapel she will not bow down ... Dorothy Hewett's real audacity is that she summons up the whole rich tapestry-field of heroes and heroic questing, and by implication insists that a demanding, gifted woman's confused and confusing experience in the twentieth century can actually be its living equivalent. If the idea is flamboyant, it is also essential to the play's meaning. There is something more urgent here than metaphor. (emphasis added; Lawson qtd in History 149)

Even though Rees finds this play memorable for reasons stated above, he does not analyse the play's critique of the supremacy of intellect nor the authority of social institutions who rule by the repression of everything else to rationality and religious dogma. Instead he chooses to stand by the traditional dramatic definitions which not only separate intellect from emotion but restrain anything resembling the latter by accepted dramatic conventions such as high tragedy; all in the name of morality:

> For me, 'thinking with one's blood' is an individualistic-subjective, non-rational approach to solving the world's problems, though it may appear to solve one's own for a while. It does not sufficiently admit of the exercise of what Bernard Shaw called 'moral passion' in art, or what T.S. Eliot called 'the moral imagination'. (148)

By way of explanation for such conventions as "moral passion", I might preempt my later discussion of their dramatic historical basis by quoting John Dennis in his Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry (1701), writing on the three things involved in the perfection of poetry which was an integral part of the debate in the construction of the great dramatic standards:

> The first is nature, which is the foundation and basis of all. For nature is the same thing with genius, and genius and passion are all one ... The second thing is art, by which I mean those rules, and that method, which capacitate us to manage every thing with the utmost dexterity that may contribute to the raising of passion. (emphasis mine; qtd. in Herrick 26)

While the erection of passion is thus contained by the methodological hand of Art, Rees finally redeems Hewett for her "naked passionate commitment to the truth as she sees it" (149) by referring to Aarne Neeme, the play's original producer in Western Australia who quoted Hebbel, "all dramatic art has to do with impropriety and incomprehension, for what is more improper and uncomprehending than passion?" (emphasis mine; 149). At this point, one can only wonder, whose?

Alma De Groen is another of Australia's most well-known female playwrights, but her plays endure similar criticisms and distribution problems which contribute to eventual erasure. She told me in an interview that her play The Joss Adams Show was still in demand for productions, yet it went out of print along with Going Home and Perfectly All Right. Joss Adams confronts the issue of baby-battering and critic Leonard Radic in The Age calls this play "a gesture in the right direction--that is all" (2 Oct 1972, p 2). He agrees that De Groen is a "writer of individuality and immense promise" and that her interest in the baby battering syndrome "goes well beyond the journalistic" since her play asks what "precipitates such a monstrous action" (2). However, he regards the play as "too slight to provide more than a glimmer of an answer" and does not say more about the representation of surrounding social factors other than calling the husband character "ineffectual", the parents "well-meaning" and the doctor who delivered the child as "having an existence only in relation to her" (2). In yet another critique of form he concludes that:

> While Mrs. De Groen has a sharp and profound insight into the female psyche, she lacks the technical skill and control of form to convert her intuitions and her understanding into a work of real power and originality. (emphasis added; 2)

Jack Clancy of the Nation Review gives a slightly better description of the play:

> The brutal indifference of the husband, the apathy and incomprehension of well-meaning but not-wanting-to-get-involved parents, and the insensitivity of the doctor are framed by the impersonal voyeurism of the television

> interviewer. Yet the pathetic figure at the centre of it, Joss Adams, manages to touch on the kinds of insights which have a genuine ring. (21-27 Oct 1972, p 20)

He concludes that such insights are merely touched on in forty minutes and that this "is a pity for there is a tantalising sense that more could have been said" (20). He probably doesn't realise that if any more was said the play would almost certainly lapse into sentimentalism. In spite of his perceptions of external relationships impinging on the young mother, Joss, he describes her as "effectively touching and in the old sense 'touched'--so unable to cope that she is finally a little mad" (2), thereby rendering Joss as the problem for not coping with her social expectations. Ken Healey of the Canberra Times gives a short review praising it as "a play that needed to be written" but refers to Joss as "demented", "disastrously a mother" and unable to "communicate at all with her husband and only superficially with his parents" (29 August 1980, p 11). He concludes his review with a gender classified statement that "only a woman could have produced this series of scenes which are at once terrifying and for a man at least, a little guilt-inducing" (11). A "little guilt" is not necessarily a very useful emotion here whereas the widespread acceptance of public responsibility for the baby-battering syndrome--which is represented in the play as part and parcel of the socially acceptable lack of male participation in childcare--might have been not only useful but lifesaving. By far and away the most disturbing review of this play was by Kevon Kemp in the National Times entitled "A Women's Night Out at the Nimrod" (30 June-5 July 1975, p 25). He credits the Nimrod Theatre as "generously paying its dues to 1975, the Year of the Woman" by staging four pieces by Jennifer Compton and two by Alma De Groen, saying that they add up into "a broadly washed-in slick documentary of some obvious man-woman situations. One or two of them carry a mild ration of wit" (25). His summary of Joss is as follows:

> Fanfared by a spectacular dress up of a TV show, The Joss Adams Show displays a young wife with a lout husband, who is driven by isolation and lack of

> affection into killing her infant. As well, this documentary also gets off some scores against repressed and ignorant parents, overbearing doctors, quite a few of the more often expressed woman's grievances of the day. (emphasis mine; 25)

Rather than intelligently regarding the play as raising serious social issues which affect everyone, Kemp manages to contrive the play as a woman's whinge, full of "scores" and "grievances". Maggie Humm argues that instead of heeding male critics who talk about the distortions of women writers, we need to "identify the way male readings are themselves full of specific defences and distortions" and specifically to:

> demolish the whole argument of male criticism in which the perspective of a non-aligned male critic is assumed to be sexually neutral while a feminist is seen as a case of special pleading. (Feminist Criticism 12)

Kemp manages to describe a fictional character as driven to murder by social isolation within a typical institutionalised relationship, and then in an almost unbelievable turn of phrase, labels the play a documentary instead of a dramatic production in a theatre. This allows him to compare the play with the documentary form so that his concluding statement becomes an obvious critical diminishing of Joss as important playwrighting:

> Despite some sharp design from William Passmore ... and some very driving production from Mr. Richard Wherrett, the lasting impression of the entertainment is lightweight and lucky dip. The problems aired are those already notably covered by the weekly magazines and in some outstanding television studies. (emphasis mine; 25)

It could be argued that it is a theatrical impossibility simultaneously to describe a performance as a "driving production" implying similar dramatic qualities in the play such as well-structured, strongly paced, and hard-hitting, in the same context as "lightweight and lucky dip" entertainment with which one might associate bingo or horse-racing; and my conclusion is that he simply wanted to praise the two male participants in the show under a thinly veiled contempt for women writers in the theatre of 1975.

Contemporary Australian playwright, Alison Lyssa, received much critical acclaim for her play Pinball, which represented a custody struggle between a lesbian mother and her ex-husband, although in the Bulletin, Brian Hoad dismissed the first production as "yet another piece of crude and tedious female chauvinist piggery" (29 Sept 1981, p 85). Critical reception for her play, The Boiling Frog, however, was extremely negative. Frog's main character, Joan, moves through several centuries from the Great Plague and horrible housing conditions in the 17th, to the coal mine cave-ins and the English enclosure movement of the 18th, and lastly to a culture preoccupied with the death threat of nuclear holocaust in the 20th. According to Lyssa:

> Joan is my own version of Joan of Arc. My Joan is not trying to lead an army into battle to save a kingdom but to be a part of a new way of looking at things. That means redefining hero. (Belles Lettres, Sept/Oct 1986, p 4)

In her review of the play from the same issue of Belles Lettres, Rosemary Curb describes the title which comes from a science experiment:

> If you toss a frog in a pot of boiling water it will jump right out; but if you toss the frog in room temperature water and slowly heat it, you can boil the unwary frog. The play suggests that we (all life on the planet) are the frog haplessly and without resistance getting cooked. (4)

Paul McGillick of the National Times credited Nimrod with "an enormously energetic production" which was "very pacy and entertaining" but said that the play "contributed little to a genuine dialectic" (20-26 July 1984, p 33). This was because he felt that Frog gave "the opposition an airing, but [fell] far short of taking it seriously"; which according to McGillick's interpretation of English playwright, John Arden, is necessary for political theatre:

> If you didn't take the opposition's views seriously, you wouldn't bother writing a play attacking them. Therefore, political theatre--the theatre of conflict--should take both points of view seriously. The fact that Arden has since forgotten his own advice doesn't alter the fact that true dramatic conflict comes out of opposing the views of people 'whose integrity and strength of mind one can respect'. (emphasis added;

33)

He never even says exactly why he thinks the "opposition" wasn't taken seriously, but goes on to say what a pity it is that there is no doubt as to "who is the Big Bad Wolf and who is Goldilocks" since this apparently "detracts from some otherwise good writing" and "undermines what is in many respects a top piece of dramatic invention" (33). McGillick doesn't bother to discuss Brecht's political theatre which also left little doubt about the sides of an issue being critiqued, nor does he explain why critics don't take the plays written by women seriously. Some reasons for his discomfort might be gleaned from the comment that he thinks the first two acts work best because of:

> historical settings which act as a distancing device. There are some strong dramatic images, plenty of laughs, and deft punctuation with songs commenting on the action. But without historical distance, Lyssa starts laying it on with a trowel in the third act and the results are frankly maudlin. (emphasis added; 33)

It is possible he is calling the Carpenter/Soldier character maudlin when he lays down his weapons and shelters a baby in the Third Act; then again it could be helicopters shooting what are thought to be demonstrators near the nuclear reactor; with such an unspecific review it is difficult to tell. H.G. Kippax of the Sydney Herald calls this play "the most off-putting title of the year" offering an evening of "unrelieved tedium", "tired Brechtian directorial devices" and the kind of "silly anti-intellectual dogmatism" that loses the anti-uranium lobby intelligent support. Kippax moves through the usual structuralist criticisms quickly:

> What has to be emphasised is that its parade of poor abused humanity down through the ages never begins in its preaching against sin to give us even the elements of drama ... There is not even the beginning of conflict in drama's sense of the term--only wailing and gnashing of teeth about the black death, witchhunting and superstition, about capitalism, religion and industrialism, and finally about science generally, modern technology, and one gathers, government of all kinds. (emphasis mine; 13 July 1984, p 10)

Kippax also took a swipe at the Theatre Board while

questioning why Nimrod would stage such a terrible play, and guessed it could be "because the author was for a year or so Nimrod's playwright-in-residence with Theatre Board support and that Nimrod did not want to prejudice a commendable scheme by admitting failure in this case" (10). He states that this play will not "convince the Theatre Board" and in a curious interpretation of audience reaction--similar to the disparaging remarks about audience "sniggers" in the John Barber's review of When I Was A Girl--he goes on to say:

> Nor, on the first night, did it convince an audience many of whom, I would guess from their laughter, would have welcomed satire of force against the uranium industry as relief from this week's decision in Canberra. (emphasis added; 10)

Lyssa confronts the issue of critical reception and said that Hester Eisenstein told her why she thought the critics could praise Pinball but rip Frog to pieces:

> As long as you're writing about what they see as women's issues, they can be patronising and pat you on the head and say, 'that's a nice curiosity'. But you dare step into the political arena and write about the whole world! You dare challenge the entire political structure! No wonder they got angry with you. (Belles Lettres 4)

Again there is the reference to the domestic realm, now as "women's issues" versus the more "political" public sphere. Curb said that "holding a Brechtian mirror up to the necrophilia of the patriarchal system did not, however, win the critical praise that a mother's struggle for her child did" (Belles 4).

Brian Hoad, writing in the Bulletin, used his pallid review of Frog as a mouthpiece to attack the Australia Council's policy as documented in "Women in the Arts: A Strategy for Action". His review is called "Disaster from a 'committee'" and begins by warning that the Australia Council is going to "persist with, indeed insist on, the sexual democratisation of the arts" despite the fact that women have dominated such areas as dance or crafts and "no draconian action is as yet being considered to force more men to take up ballet or basket-weaving" (24 July 1984, p 60). Perhaps if Hoad had paid more attention to the global recognition of

discrimination based on sex within the U.N.'s Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, he would not have referred to affirmative action as draconian.[7] Thus Hoad ignores the historical presence of gender bias that discriminated against women by restricting their freedom of choice in the first instance, relegating them to ballet and crafts, so that he can ignorantly have a go at the affirmative action plans designed to remove this previous discrimination, and to improve the long term successful participation of women in musical performance (where they comprise only fifteen percent of the work force). He argues that:

> through the natural course of events, women and men are now more or less equally represented when it comes to the performance of classical music. But the council is not prepared to wait for the natural course of events in other fields. (60)

Without theorising what that "natural" course of events might be, he then attacked the Council's "sexist" approach to the arts with respect to the Women in Theatre Project in 1980-81, which centred on Sydney's Nimrod Theatre. Hoad says that women made up 46 percent of the acting force and 31 percent of directors and designers and thus theatre was not a sexually imbalanced area in the arts. However, Chris Westwood, who organised the project, claims in Australasian

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[7] Following the U.N.'s Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, one of their main activities was to define the general issues in the Declaration, by making Conventions which have the full force of law, and from 1948 to 1960 they adopted a series of Conventions regarding the status of women. In 1967 the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, with a Convention outlining its general scope being adopted in 1979; thus far 99 nation States have ratified this Convention. In a Keynote address presented by Mrs. Mona Makram Ebeid of Egypt, at the Inter-Parliamentary Symposium on The Participation of Women in the Political and Parliamentary Decision-making Process, she says that "Article 4 of the Convention provides that 'adoption by States Parties of temporary special measures aimed at accelerating de facto equality between men and women shall not be considered discrimination'". (Series "Reports and Documents," No. 16, Geneva, 1989, p 31).

Drama Studies that, though some attention had been paid to women in theatre during 1975, "nothing had succeeded in making 'women' an ongoing and permanently integrated part of Australian theatre" (Oct 1982, p 40). The focus was on Nimrod as the "landmark professional theatre" and Westwood pointed out that their more readily available statistics showed:

> it had produced the work of only four women writers: Jennifer Compton, Alma de Groen, Eleanor Witcombe and Moya Henderson. It had used 214 actresses compared with 544 actors, thus reflecting the proportion of available female and male roles. There had been no female directors at all; 33 male composers/musical directors compared with 8 female; and only 26 female designers compared with 133 men. (40)

Hoad has obviously calculated 214 actresses against 544 actors to argue his 46 percent which masks the lack of roles for women, while he lumped zero directors in with 26 women designers against 133 men in order to produce his figure of women as 31 percent of directors and designers. Following his claim to balance in the theatre he argues that the project and the stage:

> proved particularly attractive as a soap-box for the militants involved. They took advantage of it. The results of that tumultuous experiment threw Nimrod into a state of financial and artistic chaos and little else of dramatic interest was achieved. Now, just as it seemed the company was settling down again, up pops The Boiling Frog.... (60)

At this point, Hoad finally gets around to mentioning the play which this article is supposed to be reviewing. After calling Pinball a "shouting match for a couple of lesbian mothers" he then describes Frog as taking on a broader theme which "attempts to explore the uses and abuses of technology through the eyes of a team of time travellers ... They try to lighten their burden of socio-scientific concern with song and dance along the way" (60). After writing only this briefest of summaries, he lists the sex of the characters and the production team, sliding in and out of the play and the Council's document on sexism:

> And to make up the correct numbers, according to the dictates of the Australia Council, a couple of wicked

> modern male scientists ... are dragged into the action from time to time ... Despite such ideological correctness, everybody concerned is seen to bog down from the start in the self-conscious earnestness of the writing and the grotesque contrivances of the plot. (60)

Hoad considers that the explanation for this "theatrical disaster" is provided by the playwright who "takes up two pages of the program to thank a host of helpers including members of her 'writers' group'" (60). In a final gesture he brings his grand metaphor together--(remember, "Disaster from a 'committee'")--by uniting his review of Frog, his attack on the Arts Council, and government politics:

> It seems that neither the women-in-theatre movement nor the Australia Council nor even Nimrod itself is aware that, despite endless efforts in such places as Russia or China to prove otherwise, art cannot be created by committee. (emphasis mine; 60)

This attack on collectivity is simply another version of traditional criticism which defines art as an individual creation--though this is an obvious myth in drama as playwright Marsha Norman points out:

> Most [critics] can't tell the difference between the play and the production. They don't understand that the director is the author of the production. It is a myth that playwrights have total control ... Of course, ultimately you end up taking full responsibility for the production. (qtd in Dolan 323)

Although there is a set of words and stage directions in the script, the director has the power to alter, cut, or otherwise heavily impinge on the playwright's text through many modes such as the stage, lighting, costumes, make-up and acting directions. In the process of production, a play also moves through a collaborative effort involving director, actors, producers, dramaturgs, and sometimes the playwright. As Case points out in Feminism and Theatre:

> The written text is only one of these and is not necessarily the definitive one. There is the text printed in a book and read as literature, the text the director reads preparing for rehearsal, the rehearsal text the actor uses, and the production text the audience receives as it watches the play. (115)

What is happening in Lyssa's program is that she is actually acknowledging this collaborative process and giving away her

central position as author; and what Hoad really wants to say is that no matter how much government money or attention is given to women playwrights, he will not see them as capable of creating good dramatic art.

While Hoad and other critics react with hostility towards any 'unnatural' efforts to increase opportunities for women in theatre, and no apparent 'natural' erosion of gender-biased criticisms in traditional definitions of drama is in sight, it obviously creates an almost impossible barrier to overcome, not only for writers but for all aspects of production. In the section of the 1984 London Theatre Index where critics review the year, only one even mentions When I Was A Girl (which took out the award for Best Play), and that was Jack Tinker of City Limits, who also noted that it was the Fringe which got on with "nurturing new talent and taking risks" and "provided the real theatrical fireworks" (15). He commented further that:

> the major contributions of the year, and surely the phenomenon that will leave the greatest long term mark upon British theatre was the remarkable upsurge in writing by women. Not that they haven't always been there but 1984 was the year that women really made their voices heard. (15)

Despite the participation of women playwrights in the Fringe, the review did take account of the fact that "apart from Caryl Churchill's intriguing and infuriating Softcops for the RSC ... the two major subsidised companies kept the doors firmly shut to women" (emphasis mine; 15). Austin Quigley notes the simultaneous existence of an official National Theatre in England, opened in 1976 to honor the "best in canonical English culture", with an alternative theatre emerging from communities (Brater 25):

> One stands on the South Bank of the Thames, cost 16 million pounds to build, is subsidised to the tune of 2 million pounds per year and will eventually employ 500 staff and just over 100 actors. The other exists in workshops, community centres, and short-life premises all over the country. It performs everywhere and anywhere from parks and art galleries to schools, trade union halls and art centres, taking theatre to people where they want to see it, helping them to celebrate, to organise campaigns, to enjoy themselves,

> bringing old and new ideas to their notice. This national theatre, using existing buildings often many years old, is subsidised to the tune of 700,000 pounds, employs over 1,000 people and is still expanding. (qtd. in Brater 25)

This strategic gap was explored further by the Conference of Women Theatre Directors and Administrators in London who commissioned a twelve month survey in England and Wales on women's participation in theatre. The results are discussed in an article called "Why Can't a Woman" published in the London Theatre Record, which observes that:

> the more money and the more prestige a theatre has, the less women will be employed as directors and administrators; the less likelihood that a play written by a woman will be commissioned or produced, unless that woman is Agatha Christie; and the less women there will be on the board. (9-22 April 1984, p 282)

Statistics reveal that "the higher you go, the fewer women you find in authority" and the evidence suggests that women are not involved in planning or controlling what is produced in Britain's major theatres. This is considered an absence which "is in painful contrast to their majority in higher education arts courses, in audiences, and in the supporting roles in offices" (282). The figures also show that in the largely unsubsidised area of alternative and community theatre, the percentage of women administrators and directors is forty-four percent. With respect to women playwrights, out of one thousand and twenty-four plays produced during the survey year, only a hundred of them were written by women. While they supplied a quarter of plays produced in Fringe theatres "they were responsible for only 46 of the 700 put on at regional and national level in producing repertory theatres" (282). The article concludes that:

> A picture emerges of a lot of presumably talented women swimming strongly in the lower reaches of the theatrical stream, very few of whom make it upriver to the big pools of subsidised resource and cultural influence ... At a time when playwrights such as Caryl Churchill, Sarah Daniels, Pam Gems and Louise Page are starting to hack out a place for themselves in the commercial as well as the subsidised theatre, it would appear that a lot of other bright female hopes are being thwarted in their theatrical ambitions. (282)

The combined effects of institutional dominance by traditionalist and gender-biased perceptions results in what British playwright Bryony Lavery relates as good work "being stopped by lack of money, lack of vision" (qtd. in Hinds 28-29). A writer trying to gain experience is thwarted by the catch-22 described by Australian playwright, Marien Dreyer, in Theatregoer:

> It all boils down to this--you can write a play ... But, you can't get that play produced because you haven't a name as a playwright and unless you can get a play produced you can't learn from errors and, until you do get a play produced, you can't get a name as a playwright--which is where we came in. (Dec-Jan 1961-2, p 40)

Although her play Wish No More (1961) won the Playwrights Advisory Board Competition for Best Play, she still was unable to get the play produced or published. She describes the reactions of producers "who cry 'But you've got too many people--too many sets--and that wardrobe....' Words fail after that" (40-41). These responses to her play, which has "24 people in the cast (six major characters), several scene changes and requires--for four of the characters--an elaborate wardrobe" (40), at first made her feel apologetic. When she questioned producers about plays like Auntie Mame and The Women which both have large casts and costumes, she was told "oh, but that's different--that was successfully done overseas" (41). Her further research on American plays performed in Australia revealed that there were at least forty plays with casts ranging from fifteen to fifty-nine, and NIDA had staged You Can't Take It With You (cast 19) and Our Town (cast 28), with no problems about cast size, sets or wardrobe costs. Dreyer wryly concludes:

> Of course, the obvious solution is to write a play set in the Simpson Desert with a cast of two (1m,1f) both of whom wear barrels, which would solve the problem of cast, sets and wardrobe. (41)

Her satirical remark refers somewhat prophetically to the minimal set plays of Samuel Beckett, such as Happy Days or Waiting for Godot.

Another issue involved with continued production is

publication. It is obvious that women who are participating in the "fringe" areas of theatre rarely receive attention from prestigious companies who possess the necessary capital to stage more publicly available larger productions, a factor which coincides with imminent publication. Bryony Lavery comments that though she has thirty pieces of work behind her, she does not have anything published and "I've recently come round to the idea that having my plays published would make them more available--so I feel I have a duty", but she adds that her problem with this is that newer work gets ignored in favor of the already published text (qtd. in Hinds 28). However, publication is important as a record since plays are rarely produced exactly as the written published text. Wandor, both playwright and critic, argues that it is critical for women to have their work published, "you don't have a history as a writer unless you're published, and if you don't get into history your work doesn't get done again" (qtd. in Hinds 30). However, I have shown that even if women playwrights win awards or achieve publication, their texts still remain outside the drama discourse as constructed by anthologies and institutional curricula and, although publication does provide easier access to textual recuperation, texts often go out of print and are hard to locate in libraries or bookstores, so that the plays eventually stop being produced. Because plays by women are not represented as achieving sufficient recognition at the educational curriculum level, they do not become part of the common knowledge about theatre and fall into erasure. As Wandor says:

> We've got Shakespeare on our backs--great playwrights have always been very important to this country and they're all men. It needs a huge imaginative shift to allow women to take a place here, with the weight of such a tradition against them. (qtd. in Hinds 30)

Such an imaginative shift is going to require extensive and imaginative analysis that examines tradition not as an essentially 'male' thing but as a predominantly male-defined structure which can be analysed and questioned; possessing a certain identity, philosophy, and methodology that has

constituted the standards of good form and dramatic subject in great drama.

I am interested in studying the response to plays by women, not with women as a unifying category that functions to exclude others, but as a collective thread characterised by nonproduction, and erasure as a tool of dominance in discourse. The fact is that published plays by women have been successful and received distinguished awards and yet still remain out of the long term production in the intertextual field of discourse afforded by participation in the dramatic anthologies and educational curricula. This signifies a problem in how representation is controlled, not only for award winning plays but also for those that were successful in performance but never published, remembering also that the vast majority of plays by men in anthologies were not prize winners. This exclusion also signals the necessity to expose the crisis of representation itself as a dominant mode operating in language and the formation of traditional literary and social standards, since it has been used to proclaim objectivity, when in fact it is a mask for the subjectivity of those who control representation in various institutions of social production. The example of a lack of inclusion of recognised plays into the anthologies indicates that such representation is not simply mimetic of the field as it claims to be but, instead, creates the reality of modern drama history as chosen by those who control such selections in a mimesis of the identity inherent in a set of historical standards that the critics reproduce in their judgements. This offers a site of analysis which shifts the emphasis from the individual text to the process of nonproduction in the intertextual social field. The work of tracing erasure has led me to ask questions about the structures of representation itself; how has it been controlled to produce the authority of tradition such that some subjects have been promoted while others are excluded; and what effect has this had in the construction and maintenance of "naturalised" ideologies, for example, women

don't write plays? The continued use of the historical absence of women's texts as proof of lack of ability obviously ignores the assumed power of social institutions to define standards, prescribe ability, and then provide selective access to texts. Open to speculation is the degree to which anthological/curricular absence affects the construction of gender and the possibilities for writing ability, such that appearance begets erasure begets absence until absence becomes the dominant rule, with appearance the exception.

C). Reading Erasure: Field Theory and Bridging the Canyon

Preamble

What is not there conditions what is, as surely as though it too were present.
Christine Froula, "Quantum Physics/Postmodern Metaphysics: The Nature of Jacques Derrida"

In Section (C) I will summarise the traces of erasure from Sections (A) and (B) as the evidence which led me to certain theories of poststructuralism that I found relevant for utilising a deconstructive practice, and developing my philosophy of feminism. I have placed my discussion of practice, philosophical position and the poststructuralist theories of representation which have informed them at this point in the thesis for several reasons. On a theoretical level, I wanted to present the reader with the evidence of erasure first to show how the texts depend upon philosophical structures that lend themselves to deconstructive analysis, as well as to a critique of prejudiced gender assumptions. As deconstruction is actually not a new form of literary criticism but a series of tactics and devices for analysing the structures and prejudices of philosophy, it is not a "position" per se from which one criticises art or determines meaning. As Ulmer points out in Applied Grammatology, Derrida deconstructs philosophical works, but he mimes literary or artistic texts (x). Thus I did not choose a critical position first, for the purpose of applying it to a body of literature that I would call arttexts, like the plays. Rather it was the discovery of erasure that motivated me to investigate what makes erasure possible, using deconstruction to reread the philosophical literature which forms the basis of the critical practices we read in the reviews and in the discourses that have affected women playwrights. To write an extended piece of work one must articulate a philosophical position early. However, it was not until I had actually read the plays; studied literary criticism, feminist theory and poststructuralist theories of representation; read the reviews and located a core opposition; and then employed a deconstructive reading

analysis through both the (hu)man and women's discourses that I arrived at a philosophical position in feminism in this text. My practice reflects an intersection of theories dealing with a critique of language and gender that most closely aligns with poststructuralist feminism, which has implications for the practice of literary criticism and the defining of a feminist genre of drama that I will discuss further at the end of Part Three (C), "The Position Mission and the Anti-Canon".

Secondly, I wanted to document the evidence of erasure as nonreception and how this has left traces in critical language and philosophical structures we can question, because this evidence has affected how I locate myself to do work in this text. Erasure is indicative of a (hu)man discourse whose identity is partially defined by the manufactured absence of women's texts and dialogue; a discourse that not only excludes contradiction (opposites) in the construction of identity but through its dualistic logic also excludes the middle way. Erasure indicates a refusal to dialogue across boundaries in a discourse that does not receive nor dialogue with women who are defined as inferior opposites. This discourse preserves a dominant presence through the erasure of texts, the repression of dialogue, and the resistance to critique via marginalisation, all practices that (re)produce and sustain the dominance of particular worldviews over others. My strategy for "reading erasure" then is a deconstructive practice of analysing the philosophical structures in the (hu)man discourse that underlie the prejudices, the dominant definition of power, and the way of thinking erasure reflects. However, for me, reading erasure also means to understand and theorise beyond erasure, and philosophically and imaginatively to dissolve the gender dichotomy it has produced. Though this dichotomy rests upon a metaphysical canyon of opposites, erasure occurs in a field of discourse where the very notion of opposite is questioned by interconnectivity and relativity; accordingly, in locating myself in this field of intertextuality I will

inhabit and read through the structures of both "sides". My work of bridging this dichotomous gender gulf is deconstructively to read and show that they are not opposite, but oppositional, as well as similar. Hopefully my text will establish a dialogue to bridge the representations that, by exaggerating difference, have excluded the resemblance which reminds us of the connectivity of this field.

* * *

The Evidence

At this stage I will summarise the evidence and the picture of nonreception presented so far as it points to the necessity for a strategy to read erasure, and then discuss the theories that I feel offer a useful practice for addressing the structures which produce erasure and hence dominance in the field of discourse. The traces of erasure can be summarised as follows: 1) consistent gender biased language in reviews, based on binary opposites that privilege the masculine polarity and experiences, that classify plays by women as "women's", and that exclude reference to many themes represented in the plays; 2) a notion of universality that depends on a (hu)man/woman dichotomy, with the subsequent existence of two separate discourses that represent the academic canon canyon and the obvious repression of dialogue in the so-called human discourse; and 3) the indication of power as control of representation instead of only "objective" standards. I see these traces as evidence of what Nelly Furman calls the "prejudices which create the authority of tradition in the first place", in her article "The Politics of Language: Beyond the Gender Principle":

> An unfortunate consequence of the critics' efforts towards a separate, but equally valid, literary tradition is that they leave unquestioned some of the prejudices which create the authority of tradition in the first place. Among those notions unchallenged are: universal human experience, and reflection of experience in literary representation. (Making a Difference 63)

The main prejudices that I will challenge in this thesis from the evidence are the masculinist notion of universal human experience, the notion of "real" experience as reflected in literary representation, and also the notion of power as dominance. These notions in philosophy have created the tradition of authority including erasure and the repression of dialogue in the formation of Knowledge, and this is the environment of the impossible position of the female artist who is caught between the definitions of two supposedly opposite discourses, the (hu)man and the women's.

The evidence of erasure as presented in Part One (A) and (B) supports the existence of a gender canyon in language that exists across the spectrum of literary, sociological, and philosophical discourses, where gender definitions from the social realm have been incorporated within the gender biased standards for judging "good" drama in literary critical practices. In this field of textuality where texts compete for production, the control of representation through biased standards and erasure means that certain representations of "reality" and "meaning" have been produced without full dialogue, effecting distortions not only in the academic "literary" discourse but also in the broader "sociological" discourse as they interrelate and (re)produce each other in what is represented as the intertextual field of human discourse. Thus the gender canyon--as reflected in the academic canon through the manufactured absence of women's texts, and by the representation which differentiates human plays from "women's" plays,--has established a false tradition of universal human experience that excludes dialogue with women as inferior opposites.

As we have seen in Sections (A) and (B), the evidence of erasure as nonreception involves gender biased critical language and binary oppositional logic; these reflect philosophical structures in language and philosophy derived from Aristotelian western metaphysics that (re)produce a certain way of thinking about meaning and identity in the (hu)man discourse. However, it is also prejudice that forms the (hu)man/woman dichotomy; and it is the use of power to control representation in the support of gender biased assumptions, that makes erasure a tool of dominance in the manufactured absence of successful women playwrights from the dramatic discourse. Absence therefore is not only due to structures; the act of erasure reflects invisible discrimination and acts of power that are dispersed throughout the intertextual field of discourse. Thus finding a strategy for reading and removing erasure is like physicists finding the invisible, uncertain particles that

leave ghostly traces in bubble chambers. I have shown that gender bias and power moves exist because of the appearance and disappearance of successful plays by women, but due to the slipperiness of prejudice and dominance as thought patterns and belief systems, one can only get at these through the traces of the absent presence left behind in the process of manufacturing absence. This process can be detected as it occurs in the intertextual field of discourse through philosophical structures in language that attempt to exclude the field in various ways, one of which is to exclude contradiction (opposites) in the construction of identity and meaning. Here we can trace an(other) dimension of erasure as the refusal to dialogue across boundaries. However, the identity of the (hu)man discourse can be illuminated by comparing the manufactured absence of women from this discourse to the presence/absence theme of Derrida's trace, about which Christine Froula comments that "what is not there conditions what is, as surely as though it too were present", in her article "Quantum Physics/Postmodern Metaphysics: The Nature of Jacques Derrida" (300). Thus the (hu)man discourse is defined by its very acts of erasure, preserving a masculinist presence that includes the manufactured absence of women even when they are very successful; indicating a certain fear about identity, indicating a certain concept of power that we are long overdue to be rid of--dominance.

To help eliminate dominance, we must be aware of its forms, its structures, and how these inhabit us, and here Froula quotes Barbara Johnson on the deconstructive ethos, "it's not what you don't know that can or cannot hurt you but what you don't know you don't know" (309). In this sense if we read through a drama anthology or a course curriculum and do not notice the manufactured absence of women playwrights, if we think it is natural, then we are unconscious victims of the dominance of erasure. We do not know we are being harmed because we do not know our thinking is being shaped by this manufacturing of absence. However, Froula goes on to say, "But it is not clear how, if at all, knowing that you don't

know what you don't know can save you, either" (309). It may not be clear how we might be saved by knowing that erasure has occurred, but whereas once we might not bump into absence, by learning to read for erasure, we can recognise when we bump into a tool of dominance and have the possibility of mobilising to remove it, which might save us. Given that we are all affected by the intertextual field of discourse which we enter through language, where everything participates in textuality, and where everything can be read as a text, then understanding the control of language and representation is of the utmost importance in addressing dominance. In this field of textuality where representation shapes our perception and belief systems, it is necessary to understand the structures that we inhabit, that inhabit us, that form social paradigms and notions of reality, so as not to be victims of invisible dominance but to be aware of the structures that produce dominance. I feel it is important that we become fluent readers and not victims of erasure, by studying its methodologies, philosophical structures, and the politics of those who use it so that when we critique dominance, we do not mimic it, nor embody it, but instead transform it by our very practice.

Reading the Evidence

In addressing the evidence of nonreception where erasure means exclusion from "objective" structures that supposedly represent the dramatic field, I have employed an intersection of theories from the discourses of feminism, poststructuralism and quantum physics in developing a philosophical position and a strategy for reading these structures. In various ways these discourses have offered a critique of strict objectivity, articulated the limitations of structures, and emphasised interconnectedness, or what I refer to as field theory, an approach that supports poststructuralist feminism and deconstruction as a useful way of reading structures, erasure and dominance in the intertextual field of discourse. However, this intersection is a largely unacknowledged interrelationship in

poststructuralist thought that I will discuss later in Words Across Discourses.

Field Theory

In physics, field is defined as "an area over which a force or influence is exerted" but with quantum physics, the limits of this concept have been expanded to include the notion of a larger interrelated field. In the sciences, this has led to a shift in the dominant mechanistic worldview from object to relationship, which, by analogy, has affected conventional thinking in philosophy as well as informing other discourses. Thus the metaphor of field has been used to describe the intertextual field of discourse which affects us through language, and it has been applied within a feminist analysis that describes the field of interrelated gender and social power structures.

Ulmer points out that both Derrida and physicist/poet Bachelard were influenced by theories of quantum physics. According to Ulmer, Bachelard from the early thirties was stating that the new physics "rendered conventional thinking in philosophy obsolete" (Ulmer 26). Ulmer goes on to show that in "White Mythology" Derrida allies his operation with Bachelard:

> Derrida's borrowing, by way of analogy (as he stresses), of Godel's notion of undecidability to characterize his own "quasi-concepts," not to mention the Einsteinian or fourth dimensional (space-time synthesis) tone of differance itself, which at once "differs" (spatial) and "defers" (temporal), indicates his sympathy for Bachelard's project. (26)

Ulmer goes on to say that Bachelard's favourite examples were the microphysics of Heisenberg and Bohr which concern:

> the uncertainty principle and the complementarity principle--having to do with the nature of light, which behaves sometimes as a particle and sometimes as a wave. Keeping in mind that light is the philosophic metaphor, any change in our understanding of its nature should affect its analogical extensions in such concepts as form and theory. (emphasis mine; 26)

Thus the change from a concept of light as a particle to the concept of light as simultaneously possessing the ability to transform into either a particle or a wave, has affected "the

philosophic metaphor" with respect to form and theory, shifting from object to interrelated field. In her talk, "Women in Science" on ABC Radio, Louise Crossley, who has a Ph.D. in Physics and in the History and Philosophy of Science, quotes physicist Fritjof Capra from The Tao of Physics:

> To the naive realist the universe is a collection of objects. To the quantum physicist, it is an inseparable web of vibrating energy patterns in which no one component has a reality independent of the whole and included in this whole, is the observer. (Ockham's Razor, 14 June 1987)

Crossley also discusses the nature of light as being crucial to a change in our understanding of objectivity, replacing the subject/object duality of the observer with the subjective participator as the key figure:

> Far from being a mechanical clock, or a set of building blocks whose parts add up to the whole, this world is more accurately described as a network of relationships in which the observer is a key figure. No longer can the scientist stand on the outside, objectively looking on. To see anything of this world the observer has to become part of the experiment. Depending upon what questions the observer asks about light, he gets a particle or a wave answer. (emphasis mine, Ockham's)

Crossley, along with the work of Bachelard and Ulmer, concurs on the analogical implications for changes in our mechanistic worldview, suggested by the findings of quantum physics:

> So quantum physics has made two fundamental changes to the dominant mechanistic worldview of science and technology. It has made subjectivity respectable, and shattered the myth of objective consciousness, and it has restored relationship not object as the central metaphor. (Ockham's)

Ulmer and Bachelard also point to the implications for a different way of thinking, particularly with respect to logic:

> Thinking in Einstein's universe, Bachelard stated, requires a new logic that breaks with all absolutes, whether Newtonian or Hegelian but especially a logic that frees itself from the identity principle (the principle of noncontradiction and the excluded middle) of Aristotelian logic. The basic feature of this nonAristotelian logic (to accomplish for the concept what nonEuclidean geometry and nonNewtonian physics

> accomplished for the object) would be a three-valued operation, including, in addition to the usual "true" and "false" values, a value labeled "absurd". (26)

In Aristotelian logic, identity or meaning constructed according to the law of noncontradiction eliminates contradictions, defined as opposite or oppositional, in order to make a "true" or meaningful proposition. However, with field theory, there are no strict opposites, only interrelated and relative positions in the field. Therefore identity is recognised as not unified, but multiple, not just conscious but unconscious, and always evolving through interaction in a field of relationships. Thus the qualities that are regarded as opposites are seen to co-exist within entities, appearing and disappearing according to cultural conditioning, through the use of repression or encouragement. As Johnson puts it:

> While traditionalists say that a thing cannot be both A and not-A, deconstructors open up ways in which A is necessarily but unpredictably already different from A. (World of Difference 14)

Additionally, a logic that "breaks with" all absolutes exposes a crisis in a theory of representation that claims its authority from a dependence upon absolutes. However, with or without the illusion of absolutes, representation cannot reflect the 'Real' because the act of re-presenting in and of itself can only participate in constructing partial 'realities'. In this sense, then, all representation is a fiction of sorts with an inevitable quality of subjectivity in the most objective attempts at representing 'reality'. And in another sense, all representations are real, in that they are valid textual constructs. Therefore, Bachelard's theory of representation is one that does not abandon, but reorients away from, empirical or experiential reality; asking that representation reflect not only "as if" but give way to a practice of reflecting "why not", thus dissolving the prejudice of "real" experience over "mere" imagination. Ulmer believes this might lead to a different organisation of pedagogical and social practice:

> Indeed the lesson of the new science...suggests that

> theoretical fictions organised into a pedagogy that would collapse the distinctions separating teaching, research, and art might have also the power to guide transformations of the lived, social world. (Ulmer 27)

Thus field theory points to a way of thinking that does not negate but "breaks with" the limitations of structures, like objectivity, identity, and Aristotelian logic, because the concept of field is a principle that adds onto and goes beyond the limitations of dualistic thinking and oppositional logic to include the "excluded middle". Erasure, on the other hand, reflects a way of thinking that manipulates meaning and "reality", by controlling representation such that certain texts are circulated in the intertextual field and contribute to "reality constructs", while others do not, with the subsequent dominance of particular worldviews over others.

Using the analogy of field theory then, poststructuralism can be seen as an attempt to become conscious of the notion of relativity and subjectivity in language as a field, where representation as a structure participates in constructing rather than reflecting "reality". Understanding language as a field also displaces the location of meaning, such that representation does not contain meaning but produces it in the process of communication. The major limitation for representation is that as a structure it restricts what is multi-dimensional by locating in a static form that which is in fact a dynamic process of dialogue and interaction: i.e. communication. But the static view of meaning as concretely located in language and representation rather than as produced through dialogue and communication is only due to a particular framework of communication, according to Michael Reddy's article "The Conduit Metaphor":

> English has a preferred framework for conceptualizing communication, and can bias thought process toward this framework, even though nothing more than common sense is necessary to devise a different, more accurate framework. (285)

He goes on to argue that certain phrases like "try to get your thoughts across better" or "you still haven't given me any idea of what you mean" (286), suggest that communication

is transferring thought processes "somehow bodily" using language. If language does transfer thoughts to others, then the logical container or vehicle for these thoughts is words and word groups like sentences. This language construct implies that words have insides and outsides, with the two areas of communication difficulty being the insertion and extraction process:

> After all, if thoughts can be 'inserted' there must be a space 'inside' wherein the meaning can reside ... A moment's reflection should nudge anyone into remembering that 'content' is a term used almost synonymously with 'ideas' and 'meaning' ... Numerous expressions make it clear that English does view words as containing or failing to contain thoughts, depending on the success or failure of the speaker's 'insertion' process. (288)

This inner/outer definition of meaning as being "in" words reveals that problems in communication then are attributed to the fault of the writer/speaker who has not inserted the meaning correctly, or the audience/reader who has not extracted the meaning correctly. By this definition the successful transfer of exact thought in language has failed due to either faulty transmission or reception. But this view of language reduces communication and the production of meaning from a back and forth process of dialogue to a simple linear transfer. Derrida discusses this linear definition of communication in Of Grammatology:

> We have seen that the traditional concept of time, an entire organization of the world and of language, was bound up with it (the linearity of the symbol). Writing in the narrow sense--and phonetic writing above all--is rooted in a past of nonlinear writing. It had to be defeated, and here one can speak, if one wishes, of technical success ... but that was not done one single time. A war was declared, and a suppression of all that resisted linearization was installed. (85)

Representation is not in fact communication itself--and without the associated process of dialogue--it is simply a reductionist activity that endlessly reproduces its own structural limitations, regardless of who or what uses it as a mode of communication. It is therefore important to have free dialogue in the human discourse in order to construct dynamic meanings by collaboration in the intertextual field,

rather than the repression of dialogue by erasure.

In summary then, the field theory approach to philosophy offers a critique of traditional notions of representation, objective authority, identity, logic, meaning, position, and power which I apply in my deconstructive readings of Part Two (the (hu)man discourse), and Part Three (the women's discourse), to address the following. Firstly, a tradition that privileges masculinist interpretations, definitions and experiences of "reality" in the assumption of authority indicates a prejudice of gender, but also depends upon a notion of objective reality where experience can be reflected as "real" in literary representation. This can be addressed by a poststructuralist critique of "objective knowledge" which expands beyond a theory of representation that depends upon reflecting a "real" or "essential" Nature of Absolutes, to one where representation constructs rather than imitates "reality" in a competing field of intertextuality. Secondly, discourse means to hold forth and to converse "in a back and forth movement" (i.e. dialogue), yet the (hu)man discourse has defined itself by the manufactured absence of dialogue with women. Again, this indicates gender prejudice, but the structures which limit and control meaning in discourse can be addressed by poststructuralist theories that critique the limitations of representation in language; these theories dislocate meaning from containment in the word to a more nonlinear process of communication where dialogue becomes a necessary feature in the ongoing process of producing meaning in any field of discourse. Thirdly, the core opposition between (hu)man and woman can be addressed by using deconstruction which I will discuss as a nonAristotelian critique of philosophical structures like the identity principle and the law of non-contradiction; structures that depend upon a metaphysics of binary oppositional logic which excludes the field through the elimination of contradiction (opposites), and the excluded middle. Finally, as for the prejudices that produce dichotomy by privileging one so-called opposite over another, and the notion of power as

dominance to support these prejudices, these depend upon an emotional way of thinking that exaggerates difference rather than resemblance in the construction and preservation of identity and meaning. As Alice Jardine writes, this is a historical reaction to difference that needs to be rethought:

> At this point it seems impossible to think difference without thinking it aggressively or defensively. But think it we must, because if we don't, it will continue to think us, as it has since Genesis at the very least. (qtd. in Johnson, emphasis mine; 1)

In reading erasure of difference, I sought a philosophical strategy which did not mimic the power structures nor the critical practices that have produced the aggression/defense response; a practice that not only analyses or critiques the prejudices, but transforms the way of thinking reflected by erasure as the manufactured absence of dialogue with difference that demands an end to dominance. While I use deconstruction as a strategy of reading that unravels the metaphysical assumptions of philosophical texts, it is the field theory of interrelationship as it occurs across several discourses (including feminism, physics and poststructuralism) that allows us to think beyond dominance as the historical reaction to difference and to evolve beyond the concept of power over others based on a notion of separateness. Field thinking allows us to theorise a broader concept of identity and ideology, in order to develop a definition of shared power based on interconnectedness, which merges with aspects of feminist theory that challenge the dichotomies of gender construction, critique hierarchical structures and the public/private split, and theorise collective forms of power.

My philosophy of feminism is concerned with social and philosophical structures, and how they produce dominance, with an emphasis on, but not limited to, the oppression of women as it involves gender, race, or class. For this reason, in my definition of feminism anyone can "be" a feminist or participate in the "work" of feminism, since I do not link being a feminist with an essential prequisite of being female. For the purpose of "reading" the structures of

erasure I am most interested in a poststructuralist critique of language, philosophy, and ways of thinking. However, my understanding of feminism has been informed by aspects of socialist feminist theory which critique structures of gender, race and class, as well as elements of radical feminism that also suggest a transformation of power structures. Because of my focus on structural transformation I am not interested in women having only an equal share of a hierarchical pie, although to change structures it is often said that one needs to work from within. However, it could be equally said that starting one's own structures or models of organisation may be easier, as long as they don't mimic the very forms of oppression which feminist thinkers have spent so much energy analysing, like the weight of tradition for example. As for the move to establish a female tradition, I think it is necessary to recuperate the texts of women to address the imbalance of the (hu)man discourse, but I will also argue in Section Three that to set up a woman's or feminist canon based on the structural principles which established the judgement strategies of the masculinist tradition is a move that mimicks rather than transforms. I support any movement to redefine gender in more positive and balanced ways, i.e. through dialogue, and not dominance, in discourse. This will probably not occur in a discourse where women's voices have been silenced, and it may not be able to occur in a discourse where women have tried to create a more receptive environment, but I do feel that to bridge the gender canyon such dialogue will have to occur some where, some time, in order to eventually give up the opposition between men and women as opposite humans.

I assume a practice/position in this text then that most closely aligns with poststructuralist feminism which I understand as a "beyond gender" perspective of language, engaging in critiques of structures that produce dominance, but without naming everything as if it had a sex, e.g. "male" theory, "women's" plays, white "male" text, power <u>is</u> masculine, etc. This approach is also involved in a critique

of the practice of literary criticism itself, as it seeks to avoid the essentialist gender principles and power politics of the (hu)man discourse that have privileged biology and "Nature" to claim superiority and power, as will be discussed in Part Two. My practice in this text, as informed by the field aspect of these intersecting discourses, suggests a methodology of reading through both discourses in the work of analysing and addressing nonreception, the gender canyon, and erasure. Confronting this gender canyon has in a sense required me to be a bridge, whereby I can analyse and dissolve the prejudiced binary opposites surrounding the (hu)man/woman dichotomy by tracing the philosophical methodologies in discourse that have affected the reception and nonreception of women playwrights. To do this I use deconstruction as a strategy of rereading certain foundational texts in the dramatic discourse, since deconstruction participates in a critique of western philosophy that reveals the limitations of its oppositional, essentialist metaphysics. By reading deconstructively through both discourses, my text provides a dialogue that questions the definitional boundaries of these seemingly opposite discourses; clarifying their difference, locating their sameness, and questioning the essentialist and dualistic philosophies as they occur, both in the gender biased standards of the (hu)man discourse, and in the positions and judgement strategies of the "women's" discourse where they mimic the structural principles of the (hu)man discourse.

As there seems to be no real consensus on what poststructuralist thought is, other than referring to the works of certain people, and there is probably similar confusion around the term poststructuralist feminism with respect to position and practice, in the next part of this chapter I will address this confusion through a discussion of my understanding of poststructuralist thought as a phenomenon related to field theory that is occurring across several discourses. This will be done through a reading of what

Johnson calls "the simplified understandings" and misrepresentations which have reduced and marginalised the politics of deconstruction as an adjunct to, rather than a transformation of, literary criticism; in much the same way that feminism has been homogeneously reduced and its political implications marginalised as an adjunct to, rather than a transformation of, power structures. Lastly, I will define deconstruction and parasitical readings, not as a new form of literary criticism, not as a critical position to authoritatively judge art, but as a strategy to reread the textual structures of philosophy and literary criticism that have judged art, and specifically for this thesis, the plays of women.

Words Across Discourses/Feminism, Physics, Poststructuralism

In Nothing Mat(t)ers by Somer Brodribb, she offers a "feminist critique of postmodernism" and early on claims:

> There is no clear conception of the meanings of poststructuralism and postmodernism, their relation, distinction or significance. Profoundly elusive, purposively ambiguous, these are terms which are not used systematically, and about which there is no consensus. Yet they have come to dominate the critical and cultural landscape. (8)

Although what Brodribb says may be true, I don't think it is true of only poststructuralism. One of the main points of poststructuralist thought is that there will be a lack of clarity in any form of static representation since meaning is an ongoing process, and that it is only dialogue that helps us to overcome this limitation. I agree there are texts that mystify, and negative representations that surround, poststructuralism which I think do dominate the landscape-- e.g. it negates feminism or any position, it is nihilistic quietism, it is apolitical, or it involves only a few male writers in literary theory-- representations that I will address throughout this thesis. The misperception that poststructuralist thought is only occupied by males in the discourse of literary theory, is due to the lack of recognition of a shift in thinking which is occurring across several discourses in the intertextual field; this is brought

about by a lack of dialogue, one of the salient signs of erasure and dominance in discourse.

In her critique of postmodernism, Brodribb points out several common misunderstandings of poststructuralist thought, starting with the obvious lack of consensus except for a few men's names. Young in his Preface to Untying the Text writes:

> There is no a great deal of consensus about what, if anything, post-structuralism is, apart perhaps from the recognition that it involves the work of Derrida. (qtd. in Brodribb 8)

As I argued earlier, this lack of consensus would be true of most discourses, however, Young is highlighting the lack of understanding that does surround poststructuralist thought. For instance, Brodribb quotes Elspeth Probyn on the definition of postmodernism as:

> the end of history; the implosion of meaning, the negation of totality and coherence; 'the body without organs'; the death of the referent; the end of the social; and the absence of politics" (qtd. in Brodribb 11)

Yet these rather dramatic statements represent an almost hysterical reaction to what is, after all, people talking about theory. Froula, Johnson and Young try to ground poststructuralist thought, not as a negation or death, but as a critique of the limits of structuralism and the binary metaphysics of philosophy. Froula describes Derrida's work on metaphysics:

> Derrida's project in Of Grammatology is to expose 'the closure. I do not say the end' of western metaphysics by means of a critique of the sign, the word, and writing. (qtd in Froula 289)

This closure is not the end of all history, meaning, or politics but a closure of the way metaphysics has been seen which thus expands our concepts of representation, meaning, history, and politics beyond a dependency on the binary structure.

Similar criticisms attack textuality and theories of representation, equating the death of the 'real' referent with the end of the world as we know it. There is still obviously a notion of 'reality', but there is a

misunderstanding between giving up an 'absolute' objective reality, and acknowledging subjective, relative 'realities' which are constructed through the control of representation and belief systems in the intertextual field that we are all connected with through language. As Johnson points out:

> To say, as Derrida has said, that there is nothing outside the text is not to say that the reader should read only one piece of literature in isolation from history, biography, and so on. It is to say that nothing can be said to be not a text, subject to the differance, the nonimmediacy, of presence or meaning... (Johnson 14)

Here Johnson alludes to the way texts are subject to differance, a term that reflects the process of meaning as it is never quite closed but always being deferred and always differing in the ongoing process of dialogue and intertextual play. Yet Brodribb sees this as "masturbation" and the end of sense:

> Deconstruction is a certain masturbation with the text, playing with the terms at hand. Derrida demonstrates the careful, contingent manipulation of meanings and the endless deferral of sense. (Brodribb 8)

In a critique of the way philosophical structures determine meaning through rules of logic to make "sense" and order, it is part of Derrida's operation on these structures to expose "sense" as an ongoing process of evolution and not closed up by logic; also that there are different kinds of sense, more related to poetry and association, like nonsense, or commonsense, etc. It is not that language never means, it is just an understanding of it as a process. It is possible to perceive the history of literary criticism as a struggle going on for the location of a unified site of meaning in language, which has alternated between confining the place of interpretation to the text, and/or the author, and/or the reader, or the structure and form of the writing, but always with the dualistic setup of object (the text) and subject (the interpreter). However, the process of producing meaning through communication and dialogue goes beyond object and subject, intersecting with the field of language in ways we may never understand. As Johnson argues, language is a

process in a field, and resists the strict dualistic interpretability which functions as the essence of criticism:

> This does not mean that language never means, but rather than beyond the apparent meaning, and even beyond the suppressed or hidden meanings (unconscious, poetic, ideological, counterdiscursive), there can always be a residue of functioning--which produces effects--that is not a sign of anything, but merely the outcome of linguistic rules, or even of 'the absolute randomness of language.' (6)

Brodribb finally attacks deconstruction as being against feminism, which is a misunderstanding of poststructuralist thought around the notion of position:

> But mostly, deconstruction means never having to say you're wrong. Or a feminist. As Derrida likes it: 'I am not against feminism, but I am not simply for feminism'...Deconstruction hopes to endlessly defer feminism. (Brodribb 9)

I will talk more later about deconstruction as a practice that is less involved with right/wrong or good/bad judgement strategies and more concerned with critiques of structural limitations. However, it is simplistic to say that deconstruction means never having a position, or never being a feminist. We cannot help but have positions in the field of discourse and ideology, it is just that we are more than one fixed position, and this interrelatedness is never just a simplistic binary opposite position. I think Brodribb makes too harsh a judgement since the way I read Derrida is that he is not against feminism, but he is also not "simply" (here read only) for feminism either. This is perhaps why you get some critics describing people like Spivak as Marxist, Feminist, Deconstructionist critics; they find it hard to "box" them into an easily recognisable position.

Yet in the midst of all this negation Brodribb does acknowledge that Young finds an expansion beyond rather than a nothingness, a critique of fundamental concepts that indicates a shift to a broader awareness of the field of language and meaning, as opposed to the nothingness or Nothing Mat(t)ers that titles her text:

> Poststructuralism, then, involves a shift from meaning to staging, or from the signified to the signifier...Broadly, however, it involves a critique

> of metaphysics (of the concepts of causality, of identity, of the subject, and of truth), of the theory of the sign, and the acknowledgement and incorporation of psychoanalaytic modes of thought. In brief, it may be said that poststructuralism fractures the serene unity of the stable sign and the unified subject. In this respect, the 'theoretical' reference points of poststructuralism can be best mapped via the work of Foucault, Lacan and Derrida, who in different ways have pushed structuralism to its limits and shown how its most radical premises open it up to its own deconstruction. (emphasis mine, qtd. in Brodribb 7)

I agree with Young that poststructuralism represents a shift rather than a negation, but here we can also see traces of erasure, in that poststructuralist thought, although occurring across contemporary discourses, is nevertheless attributed to the works of three people, as if they were the only ones pushing structuralism to its limits. What Derrida has done with language and the metaphyics of philosophy as structures, Ulmer argues that the life sciences, mathematics, and quantum physics have also done, expanding beyond the absolutes and mechanistic concepts of an "objective" reality to the interconnectedness of systems theories and an interrelated field; as indeed feminism or the "discourse of Woman" has also done by developing a critique of the interrelationship between gender and social power structures. I see poststructuralism as referring to structure and including the field beyond structure--and though these discourses are different, they are interrelated in that they critique the limitations of structures which have excluded the field, asking: on what premises, what notions of authority or tradition, what assumptions or claims to "objective reality", what prejudices, and what effects have these structures had in the intertextual field of discourse? Their common thread is the "beyond structure" or interconnectedness aspect of what I call field theory as it occurs across various contemporary discourses. So we do get a mix of words from other discourses which Derrida uses as forces to be applied to his project in language; for example, the feminine force, the life science force, the quantum physics force; but what has not been developed is the

dialogue that would acknowledge the interrelationship of these theories as they occur in other discourses.

Meaghan Morris points out in The Pirate's Fiancée that female theorists do not appear in literary theory collections but are congregated within their own feminist collections, which I discuss in Part Three as the separatism of feminist literary criticism and men. However, it is worth mentioning here to indicate the separation between male and female theorists, and therefore the lack of dialogue which could have led to an understanding of how these theories have developed in context with each other. Froula points out that Derrida was influenced by the discourse of quantum physics, and borrows freely from its "force" with his "trace":

> Further, I am arguing that both the concept of the trace and its metaphysics are extrapolated from quantum physical descriptions of subatomic events, i.e. that Derrida's is a metaphysics in the most literal sense--a situation to which he alludes in saying that his choice of the word trace (from the "trace" of the electron moving through the cloud chamber) has been imposed by 'a certain number of contemporary discourses whose force I intend to take into account...the word trace establishes the clearest connections with them'. (qtd. in Froula 312)

Although Ulmer states that Derrida uses quantum physics by analogy, he was also motivated by the life sciences, as well as the discourse of Woman where Derrida says:

> We need to find some way to proceed strategically. Starting with deconstruction of phallogocentrism, and using the feminine force, so to speak, in this move and then--and this would be the second stage or second level--to give up the opposition between men and women. (emphasis mine; Men in Feminism 194)

Although Derrida is "using" the feminine as a force so to speak, we might ask questions about how that use occurs. Where is the location of the theoretical discourse of Woman, i.e. the discourse of feminism, as it has been trying to dismantle male dominant hierarchical structures for quite some time? Has there been a borrowing, i.e. a serious dialogue, with the force of that discourse? Leslie Rabine argues not, saying that theory has been appropriated as male defined, privileging itself by the exclusion of women's

participation in the discourse of theory:

> My examination of the implicit deconstructive notions in Chodorow's work suggests a double conclusion. It suggests, on the one hand, that certain deconstructive concepts and strategies might lead us to new and deeper insights in feminist analysis. It also on the other hand, raises questions about our academic and intellectual institutions, in which deconstruction and other male poststructuralist theories receive general credit and recognition for discoveries when parallel discoveries, developed in feminist theory, but couched in a different code and, more pertinently, written by women, go unnoticed and unknown. (emphasis added, 16-17)

In this sense of using the feminine as a force, Derrida has also used other forces from contemporary discourses in constructing his own strategic practice, now referred to as deconstruction, but this "use" does not necessarily recognise a theoretical interrelationship. Spivak, who first translated Derrida into English, also suggests there is an unspoken interrelationship:

> Over the last few years, however, I have also begun to see that, rather than deconstruction simply opening a way for feminists, the figure and discourse of women opened the way for Derrida as well. (In other Worlds 84)

While Froula is mainly concerned with the interrelationship between quantum physics and deconstruction, she also suggests that poststructuralist thought is a model that is occurring across many discourses:

> "Quantum physics is the scientific prototype--as the movements toward abstract forms for painting, sculpture, music, and poetry along with such theoretical texts as Wilhelm worringer's Abstraction and Empathy and Ernest Fenollosa's The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry are aesthetic prototypes--for Derrida's critique of the western writing founded upon belief in the logos, in the logic and reason of linear writing/language". (288)

The important point here is to understand how words across discourses become forces, metaphors, or prototypes as Froula terms it, not to prove an absolute truth, but to highlight an interrelated process of 'reality' constructions--ways of thinking--as they are occurring across the field of intertextuality.

Poststructuralist thought is a prototype that is shared by several discourses, yet Brodribb attacks poststructuralist feminists, such as Meese, who are making these connections by accusing them of betraying feminism:

> There <u>is</u> an identity politics to feminist poststructuralism: an identification with the (white) male text. Elizabeth Meese, for example writes: 'When gender is the focus of examining difference, deconstructive criticism might even be said to be identical with the feminist project' (qtd. in Brodribb xxiv)

If poststructuralist thought and deconstruction point to the closure of a binary metaphysics in the field of language and philosophy, if feminist writers and physicists are also engaged in pointing to the interconnectedness of the field of interrelationship with different definitions and structures of power, it would be far more positive to dialogue and colloborate rather than engage in the need to prove origin or superiority of project. There is a need for feminist study and criticism to undo the foundations of thinking that produce erasure and dominance, but not so that we reproduce those very structures ourselves or ignore others who are also attempting the same project.

Brodribb presents a well documented case that within poststructuralism and postmodernism there is a lot of talk about no absolute referent, no meaning, death of this and death of that, if no opposition then no position and no politics, if no essentialism then no grounding ourselves in our female experiences of oppression. Yet I maintain these are all either/or arguments and predictable misrepresentations of poststructuralist thought which is attempting to go beyond a logic based on a metaphysics of binary opposition. It is hard to give up opposition if that is our only experience. For the sake of clarity, there is essence, there is nature, there is biology; I don't think even Derrida would deny this if indeed he has been motivated from the life sciences. The point is that we do not use essence or biology or experience to claim superiority and authority, i.e. "natural" white male dominance, or its mirror

reversal, female superiority. We have and must continue to articulate our experiences in the daily struggle to transform oppressive social structures, but our politics doesn't have to be organised only around a woman's body, or the colour of skin. Our experiences are not only based on biology but are also culturally constructed, so we can have a politics that critiques oppression wherever, whenever and through whatever structures, it occurs. Theory is not male, representation is not patriarchal per se, they are tools and anyone can use them, but we do need an understanding of their structural limitations and a different logic of the field to go beyond binary oppositional judgement strategies. I submit that to give up the gender opposition in language and in our heads, we need a nongendered analysis to move beyond a platform of sex, race, or class as an essential, or natural claim to power over others. In bridging the gender canyon we probably have to continue creating the chain across one link at a time, but these links must come from both sides in the process of giving up the belief system of males and females as opposite humans.

Deconstruction

In this section I will present the relationship of field theory to poststructuralist thought as it supports the practice of deconstruction, and discuss my application of parasitical readings using deconstruction as a strategy that inhabits and unravels the text as opposed to a methodology of literary criticism to be applied to art.

In the field of intertextuality, the boundaries of books are transgressed through the acts of reading and memory, such that in writing there is constant reference to the field, with quotations, footnotes, etc. Therefore any original location for "thought" becomes problematic, as does regarding the text as totally separate from the field of other texts. In Applied Grammatology Ulmer points out that as a strategy for analysing philosophical texts, deconstruction questions and unravels the binary opposites and dualistic logic of textual structures that exclude the field through

contradiction, in order to support their own assumptions, meanings, and identity:

> The philosophical work is treated as an object of study, which is analytically articulated by locating and describing the gap or discontinuity separating what the work 'says' (its conclusions and propositions) from what it 'shows' or 'displays' (its examples, data, the materials with which it, in turn, is working). (xi)

With the understanding of field theory as connectedness, and that structures by their form and identity attempt to exclude this connectivity with the field, the purpose of deconstructive practice is to show up the limitations of these structures, as they attempt to exclude the field in order to set themselves up as a separate or unified, and usually, privileged, identity. As Derrida writes:

> The movements of deconstruction do not destroy structures from the outside. They are not possible and effective, nor can they take accurate aim, except by inhabiting those structures. Inhabiting them <u>in a certain way</u>, because one always inhabits, and all the more so when one does not suspect it. Operating necessarily from the inside, borrowing all from the old structure...the enterprise of deconstruction always in a certain way falls prey to its own work. (<u>Of Grammatology</u>, p 24, italics in original)

When Derrida refers to deconstruction using words like "destroy" or "take accurate aim" I believe the intentions of deconstruction can be misleading, since my interpretation of its purpose is not a desire to destroy them as texts but to inhabit them for their boundary limitations. When Derrida talks of inhabiting the structures from the inside, to me this means that once one is in language, one is within the mediating structure of representation, and so one is also subject to the structures of philosophy in the field of discourse. However, when Derrida says that in deconstruction one inhabits the structures <u>in a certain way</u>, my understanding of this is that one inhabits, but not to mimic its structural principles and metaphysics. The project of poststructuralism is not to negate structure or binary opposites but to critique their limits, so that if structuralist thought establishes meaning through form and

content, deconstruction does not negate form but looks at meaning as form and process; if structuralism operates with a metaphysics of binary opposites and a logic of noncontradiction, then deconstruction points to the field beyond that metaphysics, where interconnectedness and relativity disturb such philosophical structures and the critical practices based on it. This is what Johnson refers to as the very radicality of deconstruction:

> In other words, if not absolute, then relative; if not objective, then subjective; if you are not for something, you are against it. Now, my understanding of what is most radical in deconstruction is precisely that it questions this basic logic of binary opposition, but not in a simple, binary, or antagonistic way. (A World of Difference, 12)

Johnson writes about deconstruction which as a word resists the opposition of destruction/construction:

> Instead of a simple either/or structure, deconstruction attempts to elaborate a discourse that says neither either/or, nor both/and nor even neither/nor, while at the same time not totally abandoning these logics either. (World, 12)

With field theory we can describe deconstruction as developing a nonAristotelian logic that adds the wave principle and the uncertainty principle. The wave principle critiques the separatist "object" nature of Aristotelian logic which excludes opposites as contradictions to determine meaning, while the uncertainty principle adds the third value which is the excluded middle between opposites, e.g. true/false and the absurd or unknown.

While some critics may understand deconstruction as a strategy applied to philosophical texts rather than as a practice of literary criticism, there may be some confusion about the implications of the theories that inform and motivate this practice. Elizabeth Grosz says:

> Deconstruction is neither a destruction of prevailing intellectual norms and theoretical ideals, nor their replacement or reconstruction by new, more acceptable forms. Deconstruction in its technical sense refers to a series of tactics and devices rather than a method: strategies to reveal the unarticulated presuppositions on which metaphysical and logocentric texts are based. (qtd. Brodribb, p 9)

Thus deconstruction is a close reading practice that unravels rather than a methodology of literary criticism that gives a judgement or interprets the meaning of literature. However, while deconstruction as a practice may not set out to destroy prevailing norms and ideals, nevertheless the theories it derives from do suggest a change in these norms, going beyond the assumptions of their philosophical structures and the ways of thinking that (re)produced them. As Johnson says:

> The question, then, is how to use history and biography deconstructively, how to seek in them not answers, causes, explanations, or origins, but new questions and new ways in which the literary and nonliterary texts alike can be made to read and rework each other. (Johnson, p 15)

Although deconstruction has been received by some as a new form of literary criticism, or a methodology, locating it as another position from which to judge art or determine meaning, nevertheless Ulmer writes that for Derrida, deconstruction is used only to analyse the structures of philosophy, this being quite different from how he treats artistic texts:

> Literary or plastic texts...are not analysed but are adopted as models or tutors to be imitated, as generative forms for the production of another text. (emphasis mine; Ulmer xi)

As Ulmer points out, Derrida has also moved on to an affirmative project in his fiction which is referred to as writing, and in Applied Grammatology Ulmer privileges this affirmative project of Derrida as compared to the deconstructive project of philosophy that has received more attention. Ulmer argues that these affirmative texts are ignored in the attempt to focus on deconstruction as literary criticism, instead of deconstruction being used to transform the practice of literary criticism as we know it through serious discussion of what Derrida does with art which he mimes by writing another text. Derrida's treatment of art therefore is not interested in a judgement of good/bad, but is a self-reflexive position involved with "I like or don't like", and if I'm inspired then I mime and generate another creative art text. Deconstruction is designed to infiltrate

the linear structures imposed by philosophy on writing which is a nonlinear process. And it shows how these structures can impose themselves in the practice of literary criticism upon art texts or plastic texts which, unlike philosophical texts, do not necessarily have the goal of a structured argument. Deconstruction analyses philosophical texts because they are not plastic but more strategically bound by the rules of reason and the logic structures of philosophical discourse. To say then, that deconstruction is a new form of "literary" criticism is to totally misunderstand the work, and more importantly to miss its political implications for academia. The obvious implication is that we do not judge an art text or a plastic text by applying linear, binary oppositional thinking to determine its meaning or value as a "good" text. Instead, it opens up a criticism, if you like, of inspired mime and creative imitation.

I have used deconstruction because it is a useful way of reading to analyse the philosophical methodologies within the discursive formation of Knowledge. This formation has included erasure in the control of representation that, as a tool of dominance in discourse, has privileged certain reality constructions in the intertextual field of discourse over others, these then participating in (re)producing and sustaining the dominance of certain worldviews over others. Deconstruction then can inhabit the text--say the text of the university--for the purpose of questioning the assumptions and limits of its structures, to critique its prejudices based on false opposites, and to examine what it excludes as inferior. This process re-establishes connectivity with the field where the text's structure has excluded it: in the attempt to construct an identity that is totally separate or totally unified; to establish authority based on this identity; to impose its version of objective or correct "reality" upon others because of this authoritative identity; and thus in the end to control representation according to its own philosophical interpretations of Truth, the Real and Knowledge. Reading erasure through deconstruction then is

the critique of structural dominance in textual construction--in philosophy and literary criticism, in both "literary" and "social" texts--through language, representation, and discourse which shape the way we see and recreate "reality" in the intertextual field of discourse.

Parasitical Readings

My practice of reading erasure is to read deconstructively through philosophical texts in a discourse, using parasitical readings. By this I mean that one inhabits the textual structures, following the construction of the text, and since each text is different this means that the inhabitation will always be different. However, there are common deconstructive strategies of reversal, displacement and locating the gap between what a text says and what it uses in its margins, and this involves investigating the opposites that the text sets up, discovering which is privileged, which is marginalised, which excluded to create the structure's very identity, and then to read those opposites for sameness, looking for the excluded resemblance and hence deconstructing the grounds for assumptions based on radical difference.

This method involves close reading using textual evidence of a text's assumptions, not however for the purpose of interpreting exactly what it means, but to try to worm a way into its very structure and definitions, through the margins it sets up. It is a process of roughing up its boundaries a bit by radically questioning its oppositions, disturbing its attempt at unity or homogeneity, and finding its fear of contradictions, so that it becomes possible to rework the assumptions produced through the text's structure. It is not exactly a critique of the text as wrong, nor a judgement of it as bad, nor an attempt at defining its meaning. It is an examination of how the text attempts to create meaning, what is dominated or excluded as a result of this meaning, and whether that meaning is privileged in the intertextual field. It is an effort not so much to find meaning as to be engaged in a constant critique of the production of meaning and ideology.

In challenging the (hu)man/woman dichotomy as it appears through the representation of two supposedly opposite discourses, I read deconstructively through both structures asking basic questions about their identities to see if they are in fact opposites, as well as looking for similarities. For example, is the so-called human discourse really human (inclusive of all humans) and is it a true discourse according to the dictionary (does it "hold forth as in lectures" and converse "in a back and forth motion" as in dialogue); and is this women's discourse really written only by, for, and about women? Secondly, in investigating the structures of erasure I ask what are the theoretical assumptions and practices of the human discourse, (which we know from gender bias to be a (hu)man discourse), and by what methodologies and politics did it become this; and are these theories and practices in any way shared by the women's discourse? Johnson says the following about reading the way an identity--including the identity of a discourse--creates its structure by privileging difference and marginalising resemblance:

> Reading, here, proceeds by identifying and dismantling differences by means of other differences that cannot be fully identified or dismantled. The starting point is often a binary difference that is subsequently shown to be an illusion created by the workings of differences much harder to pin down. The differences "between" entities (prose and poetry, man and woman, literature and theory, guilt and innocence) are shown to be based on a repression of differences "within" entities, ways in which an entity differs from itself. (emphasis mine; Johnson, World 2)

In this case the difference which is said to be "outside" of the entity is really a rejection of the same quality on the inside and therefore a rejection of its resemblance to the field. If an entity sees its resemblance to what is supposed to be its opposite, then its notion of identity collapses, marking the place where the structural boundary leaks and the entity actually resembles the outside other. But as Johnson points out:

> To say, for instance, that the difference between man and woman is an illusion created by the repression of

> differences within each may to some extent be true, but it does not account for the historical exclusion of women from the canon. Jacques Derrida may sometimes see himself as philosophically positioned as a woman, but he is not politically positioned as a woman. Being positioned as a woman is not something that is entirely voluntary. (2)

Here we are reminded that erasure is not only due to philosophical structures that create differences and oppositions in language, but also results from the force of traditions that reinforce belief systems about superiority and inferiority throughout the intertextual field of discourse. In this sense, the historical exclusion of women from the canon comes down to the politics of prejudice and power as dominance.

The Politics of Field Theory: Power Over or Power With

The concept of the field can provide a theoretical bridge across the canyons of erasure. For me this is the most interesting aspect of poststructuralist thought since it offers a strategy to deconstruct the definition of power as dominance that is inherent in the politics of erasure. If we look at the dictionary definition of power, it is the "ability to do" or "power as control, power over"; and it defines the group ability to do in terms of a "body of authority or government having dominion, rule of, control over and influence thereof", as in power politics and might is right, where an authoritative body represents others. This definition of power as control over others, privileges the ableness to do of some, while repressing the ableness to do of others. However, this either/or definition of power does not include the "ability to do" among a participating group of equals, thereby omitting the middle way which is a concept of shared power, or power with all in the field. Because erasure is a tool of dominance in discourse indicating power as control of representation, it reflects a concept of power based on a mechanistic worldview, where power over must assume separateness as necessary to its success. But the quantum worldview has changed those metaphysical assumptions from a mechanistic "objective"

reality to a systemic, interconnected field where "reality" is an uncertain, malleable perspective created constantly through our style of observation. In this worldview of connectedness, dominance and power over cannot be successful in the long term since everything affects everyone in the field; something ecology is now teaching us with a vengeance, and in this ecosystem the chain is only as strong as its weakest link. (I will discuss the dominant definition of power and its relationship to Knowledge in the deconstruction of the (hu)man discourse in Part Two, and in Part Four I will highlight a different concept of power based on relationship as theorised by women artists.)

In considering the politics of poststructuralism as informed by a field theory perspective on power, I would argue that poststructuralist thought is not apolitical, though it acknowledges the principle of undecidability, for as Johnson says:

> It is often said, in literary-theoretical circles, that to focus on undecidability is to be apolitical. Everything I have read about the abortion controversy in its present form in the United States leads me to suspect that, on the contrary, the undecidable <u>is</u> the political. There is politics precisely because there is undecidability. (<u>World</u> p 15).

Undecidability simply means that the determination of meaning is never subject to certain closure, and it never was. Thus, meaning, like politics, will always be an ongoing process of negotiation in the intertextual field of discourse. Rather than assume undecidability is a lack of stable meanings, oppositions and hence fixed positions, field theory simply offers a different understanding of position as interrelated ideologies and always changing. Therefore, rather than no position, I would argue that poststructuralist thought suggests flexible positions involved in a practice that continuously critiques ideological formation, emphasing dialogue across boundaries to monitor the effects of structures, be they critical methods, ideologies, political platforms or organisational models.

I would argue that poststructuralist thought challenges

positions of authority or a politics based on claiming power due to essential superiority. It challenges positions that present themselves as totally separate from others in the field, or positions that present as unified, homogenised, and unconscious of all the multiple ideologies that make them up. It challenges positions that privilege their difference in order to negate resemblance for the purposes of claiming justified superiority and oppression of "others" who are nevertheless equal. In short, for me poststructuralist theories, like feminist theories, challenge oppressive structures that produce dominance in the intertextual field and the oppositional way of thinking that erasure as dominance reflects. I feel that the politics of feminism and poststructuralism have not been fully received as structual transformations because they <u>are</u> both engaged in critiques of various power structures, which is precisely why erasure and marginalisation tactics are used to prevent dialogue and structural change. Just as feminism has been reduced to women's issues, women's equality and regarded as another adjunct to political positions rather than a transformation of its power structures, similarly deconstruction has been reduced to another form of literary criticism misrepresented as nihilistic quietism and appropriated as an adjunct to literary criticism rather than a transformation of its structures. Thus to achieve an intertextual discourse where the group reality is shaped by colloboration rather than control, there must be a privileging of dialogue rather than institutional erasure, with a purpose of study and a practice of criticism that is not tied to power as dominance.

PART TWO. The Politics of Erasure: Might is Right, or Deconstructing the (Hu)man Discourse

Introduction

In connection with the characters...first and most important, that they be good...but goodness exists in each class of people: there is in fact such a thing as a good woman and such a thing as a good slave, although no doubt one of these classes is inferior and the other, as a class, is worthless...for it is possible for a person to be manly in terms of character, but it is not appropriate for a woman to exhibit either this quality or the intellectual cleverness that is associated with men.

Aristotle, Poetics

Moreover, even dialogue would seem to be outside their (women's) realm, for without authority, speaking is inappropriate...

Aristotle, Politics

The right of suffrage is then truly universal when it is extended to all the adult males of the State, without regard to distinctions of property; it can not go beyond this limit and be extended to women, without violating the main principle on which the very being of the State rests for support, which is the subordination of wives to their husbands, of children to their fathers, and of slaves (in every community which has them) to their masters... but women, children and slaves are not the State, are not the protectors of society... and men--freemen--... are in fact the lords and rulers of the political community to which they belong... for a little reflection will convince us that Nature and right reason point to men as the proper depositories of political power.

Samuel Seabury, American Slavery Distinguished from the Slavery of English Theorists and Justified by the Law of Nature

The process of an interaction between individual and environment, where dominant opinion is defended and new opinion is established, was termed 'spiral of silence' (Noelle-Neumann, 1974b). People...live in perpetual fear of isolating themselves... If they find that their views predominate or increase, then they express themselves freely in public; if they find that their views are losing supporters, then they become fearful, conceal their convictions in public, and fall silent. Because the one group express themselves with self-confidence whereas the others remain silent, the former appear to be strong in public, the latter weaker than their numbers suggest.

Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann, Mass Media and Social Change in Developed Societies

The epigraphs above give textual evidence of Aristotelian definitions relating to the inferior position of

women and slaves which are carried through in Seabury's discussion of suffrage in 1861. Such definitions have set up the voicelessness, the lack of authority, and the inability to dialogue on an equal basis with women or slaves. These assumptions point to an identity of the (hu)man discourse with a social environment where males become the dominant defenders of opinion (or tradition) while women, according to Noelle-Neumann, by their sheer absence, would find it difficult to express different or contradictory opinions and fall prey to the spiral of silence. In Part Two I will show why the identity of the (hu)man discourse is a masculinist entity that in defining femininity has appropriated the body of Woman but erased the texts of her mind and voice, creating an absence which has contributed to the ongoing spiral of silence of women, the containment and colonisation of human imagination, and the dominant representation of women as "domestic" in the context of the public/private opposition.

In beginning to deconstruct what has been represented as the human discourse, the most obvious questions involve its name, i.e. is it human and inclusive of all humans who write, and is it a true discourse, does it dialogue freely? By the end of Part One, these questions were answered by the evidence of erasure, such that the human discourse can be seen to be a (hu)man discourse in that it excludes women and represses free dialogue with their texts. I traced this evidence to document primarily the "how" and some of the "why" erasure is achieved by focusing on gender biased critical practices in discourse and the representation of women in the dramatic discourse as inferior opposites in the (hu)man/woman dichotomy. In Part Two I want to explore the "why" of erasure more fully by analysing the identity of the (hu)man discourse through a deconstructive and feminist reading of foundational texts and philosophical structures that produce this belief system within the discursive formation of great drama and Knowledge. Therefore I will investigate the definitions, rules, and philosophical structures of the (hu)man discourse that have manifested

dominance through erasure as nonreception (sustained negative reception coupled with anthological exclusion); as a politics of might is right where prejudices and the power to support them have excluded women beyond the standards of institutional structures; and as the representation of women in the dramatic discourse as emotional and illogical, whose plays and themes are reduced and trivialised as "women's" plays and "women's" issues, pertaining primarily to the domestic sphere.

In Section (A), "The Gods of Great Drama: Imitation or Creation?" I will show that gender biased critical assumptions can be traced to dramatic standards derived from Classical definitions of art, nature and the Aristotelian rules that have become institutionalised as "objective" through the force of tradition. Here under the claim of poetic "imitation" of nature we find subjective and seemingly arbitrary rules that support an ideology where art is ruled by methodology in order correctly to interpret the "universals" for the didactic purpose of art. The dramatic rules alone, however, do not account for the representation of the plays and subjects of women as "women's" plays and issues.

In Section (B), "Knowledge, Gender and the Aristotelian Worldview", I explore the underlying metaphysical assumptions that produce the essentialist and separatist definitions of Woman which are based on the oppositions that 'naturally' locate reason in males, with females defined as 'naturally' emotional and incapable of reason. The shift from art as "imitation" to art as interpretation of "reality" necessitated a privileging of "male" reason in the correct representation of universal knowledge, and hence, the dominance of masculinist experiences of the public realm. This location of reason contributed to the inability to dialogue with the "unreason" of women. However, a politics of erasure that does not dialogue with women's texts, erasing them even when against all odds they do manage to succeed, exposes a control of representation based on power as

dominance or might is right. This exclusion goes beyond critical standards and derives from a belief system of women as inferior, a bias that is evident as masculine dominance across various economic, racial and political spectrums. I employ a deconstructionist and feminist analysis of the metaphysics and the philosophical structures underlying this belief system which have not only contributed to the formation of a masculinist tradition where women are represented as inferior opposites, but also reflect dominance in institutional control of representation and the construction of ideology through a politics of interpretation. I will show that the identity of the (hu)man discourse depends upon an oppositional metaphysics where Aristotelian logic and his law of non-contradiction produces dominance through the elimination of contradiction (opposites) and uncertainty in the dramatic discourse, in the construction of universal knowledge, and in philosophy and the construction of meaning. These structures insure that the (hu)man discourse is not only dependent upon socially constructed opposites such as male/reason/public and female/emotional/private, but also the exclusion of them from defined spaces to avoid contradiction, thus privileging difference in the construction and preservation of identity rather than resemblance.

In Section (C), "A Pub(l)ic/Private(s) Split, or Plays by Women: Subjects for Nonproduction", I will go on to argue that the public/private split which privileges the masculine public polarity and locates the female playwright (artist/theorist) in the domestic sphere, gives her an identity of (op)position that contributes to her erasure in the (hu)man discourse, where by its own logic, both her gender and her textual subjects function as sites for contradiction and thus become subjects for nonproduction as the evidence of erasure confirms. I will also discuss the "spiral of silence" as it relates to some of the effects of these metaphysics in the lived social world, where absence and a lack of dialogue in the intertextual field of discourse

sults in a lack of collective awareness of difference, ntradiction and resemblance; of dominance as it relates to rect and indirect power and the colonisation of the human agination; of definitions of femininity in the (hu)man iscourse which are questionable and where femininity can ronically be read as a "discourse" that appropriates the ody of Woman and her reproductive work but does not dialogue ith her mind or voice; and of the continuing dominance of he representation of the female artist/theorist as domestic, er work as "women's" plays, and her subjects and feminism as 'women's" issues.

* * * *

Section (A). The Gods of Great Drama: Imitation or Creation?

In deconstructing the identity of the (hu)man discourse where erasure has been a tool in the production of a dominant tradition, it is important to understand how the rules, methodology and philosophical structures have constructed this identity of a masculinist tradition and that it has no objective nature. The dramatic rules and literary criticism have an essentialist basis in that definitions of male and female are based on the notion of inherent essences derived from classical concepts of nature, whereby Aristotelian concepts of art and universality have functioned to exclude women from this discourse. What I am arguing in this section is that the tradition of great drama is not based on objective standards handed down on a tablet from the gods of drama, who claimed they were merely "imitating" Nature in art and thus representing the 'Real'. Instead these standards are based on subjective interpretations of Nature constructing "reality" through representation and the force of literary tradition, constituted by an ideology where art was ruled by methodology in order correctly to "create" the universals of wisdom for the didactic purpose of art as learning. The shift from inspired "imitation" to "creation" as the correct interpretation of universals laid the conceptual foundation which necessitated the wisdom, genius, and above all, Reason, of the good poet. (This led to problems for those perceived as having no reason and in the next section on Knowledge and Gender I will further deconstruct the combination of these classical concepts, their metaphysics and philosophical structures, using feminist critiques by Marjorie Grene, Meaghan Morris and Michèle Le Doeuff, followed by a critique of the implications of the dramatic rules for women by Sue-Ellen Case.)

Before discussing some of the foundational texts, I would like to quote some passages from Essays on the Critical Appreciation of Modern English Literature and Drama to illustrate the continuous historical reliance upon certain fundamental assumptions produced by the Greek founding

philosophers. In F. Jackson's essay called "The Drama in the Twentieth Century", he describes the "basis for the discussion of the drama of the twentieth century in English-speaking communities" (6):

> It is useful to recall Victor Hugo's famous dictum that spectators are of three kinds: first the women, secondly the thinkers, and last of all the crowd properly so called. The crowd demands action on the stage; women seek for passion, and the thinkers look for the display of character. The crowd so hungers for action and movement that it has no time for the study of character or of passion. Women are so preoccupied with passion that they place no value upon action or character, whilst the thinkers desire so vehemently the development of living character that, whilst willingly accepting passion as an incident in its development, they become impatient of action. (emphasis mine; 5-6)

With this perspective on women, the masses, and the educated elite, Jackson makes the following assumptions about good theatre and the theatregoer:

> It follows that the crowd demands sensation when it goes to the theatre, women emotions, and the thinker meditations and ideas. All are seeking pleasure, and all are right. The theatre must, if it is to be successful, satisfy all three elements, all three desires for action, passion, and thought ... We should bear in mind that every theatregoer has within himself the three elements--male, feminine, and mob. It follows that a great play must satisfy all three appetites; its action must seize upon our attention, its passion must feed our emotions, and its philosophy of life and the meditations of its characters must stimulate our thoughts. (emphasis mine; 6)

Jackson's conclusions about what elements are necessary for a "great play" are based on a perceptual split between body, emotions and mind as primarily located in the mob, women or men respectively; a notion derived from the dichotomies of classical philosophy pertaining to male/female, reason/emotion, and ruler/slave which appear in the dramatic rules.

In Marvin Herrick's The Fusion of Horatian and Aristotelian Literary Criticism, he argues that two important concepts which have been the basis of literary criticism are

the Aristotelian theory that art imitates nature, and the Horatian emphasis on the didactic function of poetry, with the wisdom of the poet to access universal knowledge as the source of good writing. With respect to the construction of dramatic tradition, Herrick argues that a few key concepts were established by Aristotle's Poetics. These are classical concepts of nature and art, poetic imitation, the function of poetry, and the dramatic rules themselves. Dryden expresses the Englishman's acceptance of this ancient view of nature and art:

> Thus I grant you that the knowledge of Nature was the original rule; and that all poets ought to study her, as well as Aristotle and Horace, her interpreters. But then this also undeniably follows, that those things which delight all ages must have been an imitation of Nature; which is all I contend. (emphasis mine; qtd. in Herrick 27)

Notice that Dryden tries to rely on knowledge as an imitation of Nature, yet practically in the same breath concedes that Aristotle and Horace are her "interpreters". Herrick points out the importance of 'realistic' representation in imitation and he quotes Aristotle:

> 'And it is also natural for all to delight in works of imitation. The truth of this second point is shown by experience: though the objects themselves may be painful to see, we delight to view the most realistic representations of them in art, the forms for example of the lowest animals and of dead bodies.' (emphasis mine; qtd. in Herrick 29)

What is "realistic" then is bound up with nature as "real", but Herrick goes on to show that Nature is perceived in various ways, such that he concludes the role of the poet is not simply as an imitator of nature but also as a creator or interpreter of idealised fiction, with a role of power:

> Aristotle himself provides material for the sixteenth century conception of artistic imitation as a creative process, an idealized fiction. In the Physics, which by 1555 most of the Horatian commentators seem to know, Aristotle says that art imitates nature. Perhaps Aristotle is not always clear in his use of the term nature, but one important meaning is the generative force in the universe, or, as it may be interpreted, the creative process. Thus it may be said that the

> artist creates somewhat in the same way as that in which nature creates. The ultimate stage in such a theory appears in Scaliger, who calls the poet, in his creations, almost a second deity. (emphasis mine; 33)

Some definitions of Nature regard it as residing in all humans and thus poetic imitation theoretically should be available to all humans. Cicero regards Nature as "the common mother of us all" (7), and Horace follows this up: "nature, says Horace--and here he probably is thinking of nature as the parens communis--forms our emotions within us and enables us to express them in words" (8). This notion of nature and human nature as what is common or "natural" to us all, has led to the notion of universality and the imitation of it through the expression of the poet, who could be anyone. However, Herrick points out that in Ars Poetica, "Horace sometimes uses nature in the narrower sense of natural faculty, or genius" and, when answering the question of whether nature or art is the more important force in poetry, "Horace answers the question by asserting that both nature and art are necessary" (8). Though Aristotle says that art imitates nature, to Horace and Cicero the imitation alone is not art and, thus, the role of the poet is to use his "genius" to "create" through imitation by also expressing universal, natural human emotions. This led to the dominant concept of art not as pure inspiration from "nature" (available to anyone), but with art as creative "imitation" using his genius to interpret and express "universal natural human emotions". Here art as the imitation of nature assumed an interpretive methodology for a purpose, which was learning.

While Herrick states that Horace apparently stresses pleasure in poetry, he "also insists on the didactic function of poetry; that is, he insists that wisdom, or knowledge, is the very source of all good writing" (40). Cicero was influential on sixteenth century Horatian critics, and wrote that the orator should "teach, delight and move" (41):

> In my opinion, indeed, no man can be an orator possessed of every praiseworthy accomplishment,

> unless he has attained the knowledge of everything important, and of all liberal arts, for his language must be ornate and copious from knowledge, since, unless there be beneath the surface matter understood and felt by the speaker, oratory becomes an empty and almost puerile flow of words. (emphasis mine; qtd. in Herrick 32)

Though the dual role of poetry, to teach and to delight, was established before the revival of the Poetics, scholars searched for the didactic function in Aristotle and found support in the Rhetoric:

> 'And since learning and admiring are pleasant, all things connected with them must also be pleasant; for instance, a work of imitation, such as painting, sculpture, poetry, and all that is well imitated, even if the object of imitation is not pleasant; for it is not this that causes pleasure or the reverse, but the inference that the imitation and the object imitated are identical, so that the result is that we learn something'. (qtd. in Herrick 30)

Scholars find further support in the Poetics:

> The explanation is to be found in a further fact: to be learning something is the greatest of pleasures not only to the philosopher but also to the rest of mankind, however small their capacity for it; the reason of the delight in seeing the picture is that one is at the same time learning--gathering the meaning of things, e.g., that the man there is so-and-so; for if one has not seen the thing before, one's pleasure will not be in the picture as an imitation of it, but will be due to the execution or coloring or some similar cause'. (emphasis mine; qtd. in Herrick 29)

Thus Horatian commentators accept Horace's dictum that nature and art are necessary for learning in poetry, and find satisfactory support from Aristotle. Herrick argues that the Horatian attitude towards nature and art appears with the beginnings of literary criticism, and remains a familiar attitude thereafter. He quotes Salisbury from the twelfth century:

> Art originates in nature, he believes, and natural gifts are necessary to the artist, but natural talent must always be supplemented and guided by art. (emphasis mine; 25)

In this case, "guided by art" refers to a methodology established through standards and definitions, that allow for

the correct expression of wisdom. Thus some literary critics may emphasise natural gifts and inspiration, while the neo-classical critics emphasize learning and art. However, Herrick quotes John Dennis from 1701 who claims art for the control of passion:

> The first is nature, which is the foundation and basis of all. For nature is the same thing with genius, and genius and passion are all one ... The second thing is art, by which I mean those rules, and that method, which capacitates us to manage every thing with the utmost dexterity that may contribute to the raising of passion. (26)

Thus art, supposedly an inspired imitation of nature, is revealed to be a system of rules and methodology with a specific purpose, to manage passion (that unruly thing) and distribute the wisdom of genius. Interestingly, the textual evidence links "as one" nature, passion, and genius without specific regard to sex, where only the rules and methodology of art control passion. Yet we have already seen examples in the reviews that locate reason within males providing them with an advantaged access to wisdom and genius, while emotion and thus unruly passion is located within females which sets off moral alarm bells. In the next part of this chapter I will do a deconstructive reading of the Aristotelian dramatic rules calling attention to these "essential" definitions as applied to gender, but also employing a critique of the objectivity of the rules whereby they are supposed to be a methodology for the distribution of universal wisdom in the name of inspired imitation, though I will argue that they are actually subjective and at times seemingly arbitrary rules for interpretive creation.

The Dramatic Rules

After considering some of the underlying assumptions of the Classical world view, the dramatic rules of Aristotle and Horace may seem less arbitrary, and more an extension or result of these fundamental assumptions about nature, art, and the didactic function of poetic imitation. Herrick indicates that the most important dramatic rule is literary propriety, or what is called the doctrine of decorum, which

he says colors all the other rules. He then divides the rest of the rules into seven categories:

1. Plot is the soul of poetry.
2. The dramatic unities must be observed.
3. Characters should be conventionalized.
4. All plays should be divided into five acts.
5. The chorus should be treated as one of the actors.
6. The deux ex machina should be used but sparingly.
7. Spectacle is the least artistic element in the theater.

(Poetics and the Ars Poetica, 68-69)

The doctrine of decorum in Horace's Ars Poetica "emphasizes the necessity of fitting the various parts of a poem together, the sound to the sense, the style to the thought, the character to his age and race" (48). Aristotle defined propriety of style in Rhetoric:

> 'Propriety of style will be obtained by the expression of emotion and character, and by proportion to the subject matter. Style is proportionate to the subject matter when neither weighty matters are treated offhand nor trifling matters with dignity, and no embellishment is attached to an ordinary word' ... Aristotle says that there is an appropriate style for each class and character: 'I mean class in reference to age--child, man, or old man; to sex--man or woman; to country--Lacedaemonian or Thessalian'. (emphasis mine; qtd. in Herrick 48-49)

As can be seen, there is quite a strict requirement for appropriate style according to subject matter, sex, age, and class, so that the definitions of the latter established by tradition will dictate how they must be represented in good drama. If these definitions are not followed, by women and other writers who try to carve out and represent new and different definitions, then decorum is violated and women playwrights are accused, as we have seen, of "dangerous logic" or "slovenliness". Herrick points out that, to Aristotle, plot is the most important element and, while sixteenth century commentators accepted this dictum, decorum was uppermost in the minds of the commentators "who seize upon any evidence in Aristotle that can substantiate this all-important decorum demanded by Horace and Cicero" (49):

> At the time when he is constructing his Plots, and engaged on the Diction in which they are worked

> out, the poet should remember to put the actual scenes as far as possible before his eyes. In this way, seeing everything with the vividness of an eye-witness as it were, he will devise what is appropriate, and be least likely to overlook congruities. (Poetics, qtd. in Herrick 49)

Aristotle's statement in Poetics was that "plot is the soul of tragedy", and the scholars extended this to read "plot is the soul of poetry", a maxim that became accepted (70). His emphasis on action and plot and, particularly, action in tragedy is clear:

> Character gives us qualities, but it is in our actions--what we do--that we are happy or the reverse. In a play accordingly they do not act in order to portray the Characters; they include the Characters for the sake of the action. So that it is the action in it, i.e. its Fable or Plot, that is the end an purpose of the tragedy; and the end is everywhere the chief thing. Besides this, a tragedy is impossible without action, but there may be one without Character. (qtd. in Herrick 69)

Remembering that "art imitates nature" it is interesting that a fixed plot centered around action is such a key element for what is supposedly an imitation of a rather unstable "nature", and therefore Herrick argues that the Aristotelian plot "has a definite connotation of artistic creation or fiction" (69):

> For example, Aristotle speaks of a 'well-constructed plot', and the finest plot, in his judgment, is the complex action which includes artfully arranged discoveries and reversals of fortune. (69)

Herrick addresses this contradiction between imitation and artistic fiction:

> Then we must always keep in mind Aristotle's statement that the 'poet must be more the poet of his stories or Plots than of his verses, inasmuch as he is a poet by virtue of the imitative element in his work, and it is actions that he imitates'. We must also keep in mind that the good poet, according to Aristotle, even when he selects a subject from actual history, relates what might have happened rather than what has happened. (emphasis mine; 70)

It would seem that the necessity to imitate nature conflicts greatly with the creative or fictionalised element of

Aristotle's plot construction and the poetic embellishment of "what might have happened". Nevertheless, women playwrights have been mercilessly criticised for lack of plot and action, when they may in fact have been imitating the "nature" of restricted domestic, ordinary, or working class lives.

The dramatic unities of Time, Place, and Action evolve out of the requirement that a work of art must have a unity of plot, deriving from Aristotle and Horace:

> Horace's praise of Homer for success in construction, with a coherent beginning, middle and end, naturally offers another opportunity for recommending unity of action. (76)

Thus the structure of the plot with a beginning, middle and end is supposed to unify the action, but Herrick argues that this dictum eventually becomes the demand for a single action. Herrick shows that while Aristotle mentioned in Poetics that action should proceed as "one continuous whole", it is the Horatian commentators who help to establish a "strict unity of action, demanding a single action" (76). Their interpretation may come from Aristotle's Poetics:

> 'Plots are either simple or complex, since the actions they represent are naturally of this twofold description. The action, proceeding in the way defined, as one continuous whole, I call simple when the change in the hero's fortunes takes place without Peripety or Discovery; and complex, when it involves one or the other or both'. (qtd. in Herrick 76)

Herrick argues that the phrase "one continuous whole" may be associated with "simple" plots, but not necessarily so; yet the Horatian scholars have a tendency to "demand a single action" (77):

> All conscientious followers of Plato and Aristotle know that a work of art must form one continuous whole, and if there is any doubt about the wholeness of the complex plot, then the simple plot is surely the best kind of plot. Does not Horace say that a poem should be simplex et unum? At all events, such, I gather, is the reasoning of the Horatian commentators, who not only help establish unity of action but help to establish the narrow interpretation of a single action admitting no sub-plots. (emphasis mine; 77)

Thus the emphasis on single action becomes firmly entrenched

as central to artistic unity, while according to another sixteenth century scholar, Madius: "the plot is the substance of the poem, the episodes are digressions" (71). Despite this dictum, many criticisms of plays by women consisted of attacks on the simplicity of the plot or, indeed, the inability of the female author to construct a more complex plot in a longer piece. They have even been criticised for satisfactorily resolving all conflicts within the plot. And of course, those women who did experiment with structure, using many sub-plots to shift the emphasis from one character or story to the relationship between several characters, were accused of not following the dramatic unities of time, place, and action.

At this stage, I would like to discuss briefly plot structure in relationship to the rule about the appropriate length of the play being five acts; a rule that is clearly most arbitrary but depends on longer is better and according to which women have suffered severe criticism in relation to the length of their plays and their inability to sustain a longer plot. It was Horace who said "let no play be more or less than five acts" (90), and this axiom was faithfully observed for many years until the three act play became fashionable in the 19th century. Although there is no evidence that Aristotle ever dictated five acts, he defined the tragedy as consisting of the Prologue, Episodes, Exode, and two choral portions. The Horatian commentators followed Horace's axiom about the five acts of comedy and applied its structure to tragedy as well:

> In the first act the argument is unfolded; in the second the action starts from the beginning towards the end; the third brings perturbations and impediments; the fourth brings a remedy to offset the evil; the fifth brings all to a happy conclusion. (Landinus qtd. in Herrick 90)

But apparently while Horace specified acts, Aristotle spoke of the size of plots in general; and he favoured the larger play:

> The limit, however, set by the <u>actual nature</u> of the thing is this: <u>the longer the story</u>, consistently with its being comprehensible as a

> whole, the finer it is by reason of its magnitude. As a rough general formula, 'a length which allows of the hero passing by a series of probable or necessary stages from misfortune to happiness, or from happiness to misfortune', may suffice as a limit for the magnitude of the story. (emphasis mine; Herrick 91)

Here we see the definitions relating to the "nature of the thing" and while the length of the play was to accommodate the unfolding of the various elements in the plot, it also had a didactic and aesthetic purpose which the commentators derived from Aristotle's Poetics:

> Just in the same way, then, as a beautiful whole made up of parts, or a beautiful living creature, must be of some size, a size to be taken in by the eye, so a story of Plot must be of some length, but of a length to be taken in by the memory. (emphasis mine; qtd. in Herrick 92)

This version of Poetics emphasises size in relation to memory capabilities, but another version of Aristotle stresses the aesthetic aspect:

> Again: to be beautiful, a living creature, and every whole made up of parts, must not only present a certain order in its arrangement of parts, but also be of a certain definite magnitude. Beauty is a matter of size and order. (emphasis mine; qtd. in Herrick 92)

As I have shown, in critical receptions of women's texts this dictum that length implies greatness has been the fundamental assumption by which many critics have dismissed the women's plays written as one-act pieces. Even when women did write three act plays these were seen as faulty in construction since females did not have sufficient reason and therefore could not possibly sustain the plot structure for that length of time. However, if the necessity for size to be retained in memory were so crucial, then a short play ought to be even more instrumental in educating spectators; if beauty is a matter of size and order, then the one-act play with all its economy of size is a mastery of order. Surely in the case of dramatic rules about length, we could say that beauty is very much in the eye of the beholder.

Rigidity of plot structure and linearity of narrative are also functions of, as well as parties to, the concept of

conventionalised characters with their requirement to be "real", and "consistent", so that they help facilitate the "probable" or "necessary" outcome of plot. Herrick discusses Aristotle's propriety of characters:

> There are four qualities, he says, to aim at: the characters should be (1) good, (2) appropriate, (3) like the original, and (4) self-consistent. It is the second quality that specially bears upon the doctrine of decorum: 'The second point is to make them appropriate. The Character before us may be, say, manly; but it is not appropriate in a female Character to be manly, or clever'. (emphasis mine; 49)

Here is evidence that the social definitions of gender for women are directly incorporated into the dramatic rules in terms of their representation being "appropriate" to fulfill the rule of decorum. Another scholar, Luisinus, quotes Aristotle's statement that "fine language, even in poetry, from a slave or a youth is very unbecoming" (55)--hence decorum functioning to maintain style as well as class and sex distinctions. In addition to the characters being good and appropriate, it is necessary that they are "like reality". However, the representation of the reality of human nature in Classical thought is regarded as an imitation of what is self-evidently, inherently natural essences, and not a result of their own subjective interpretations:

> 'The third is to make them like the reality, which is not the same as their being good and appropriate, in our sense of the term. The fourth is to make them consistent and the same throughout; even if inconsistency be part of the man before one for imitation as presenting that form of character, he should still be consistently inconsistent'. (qtd. in Herrick 53)

The quality of consistency in characters in deference to making them "like reality" has resulted in a homogenising or stereotyped characterisation that is still so prevalent in drama today. Herrick states that August Strindberg was one who made a vigorous protest against conventionalised stage characters:

> Strindberg goes on to protest against the fixed types that have swarmed over the stage for generations past. Even the great Moliere has

> presented these 'homogeneous' characters; ... Strindberg himself tries, he says, to make his characters 'conglomerates, made up of past and present stages of civilization, scraps of humanity, torn-off pieces of Sunday clothing turned into rags--all patched together as is the human soul itself'. (90)

More recently, feminists in theatre have heavily criticised the portrayal of women as stereotypes; in Understudies, Wandor mentions that in 1978 the Feminist Theatre Study Group picketed West End shows, handing out leaflets to "draw attention to the situation of actresses and the content of the plays" (47):

> Did the characters in this play imply that: Blondes are dumb? Wives nag? Feminists are frustrated? Whores have hearts of gold? Mothers-in-law interfere? Lesbians are aggressive? Intellectual women are frigid? Women who enjoy sex are nymphomaniacs? Older women are sexless? We are a group of theatre workers who are tired of portraying these cardboard cutouts. We want theatre managers, directors and writers to stop producing plays which insult women. (47-48)

Besides insulting women by reducing them to one-dimensional consistencies, conventional characters have also served to limit the work for women actors as Australian Chris Westwood points out in an interview from Playing the State:

> In 1981 Jude Kuring and I were sitting around in the Nimrod Theatre. I was a project officer and she, an actor, was whingeing about lack of work for women. In every play there's six roles for men and one for women and that one is the heart-of-gold whore or the mother; those stereotypes. We decided to invite some other actors to see if we could do something about it. We wrote out a questionnaire with questions such as: 'Do you ever feel like punching your director in the face?' 'Are you fed up with earning less in an average year than a boy?' (qtd. in Watson 219)

Inevitably the stereotyped characters are seen as less important, the acting is less difficult, and therefore the parts are paid less. The necessity for characters to be "like reality" and yet "consistent" is an obviously contradictory demand when supposedly imitating the nature of 'real' people who are often proven to be more changeable than consistent. Yet this dictum serves to carry out Aristotle's

orders for the plot's action to be unified, and more importantly, controlled. In this sense the characters' consistency helps to develop the consistency of the action to bring about a "probable" reality which is in fact an orchestrated one according to the tradition:

> The right thing, however, is in the Characters just as in the incidents of the play to endeavor always after the necessary or the probable; so that whenever such-and-such a personage says or does such-and-such a thing, it shall be the probable or necessary outcome of his character; and whenever this incident follows on that, it shall be either the necessary or the probable consequence of it. (Poetics, qtd. in Herrick 53)

In this statement, the characters do help to develop the incidents and are not indispensable to action. Despite Aristotle's insistence that action is so much the most important element that it is even possible to have Tragedy without characters, his rigid split between action and character breaks down when he says that the "right thing" is "in" the characters who by their "saying" and "doing" help to create the probable reality. Yet there were numerous criticisms of women playwrights as boring and unimaginative because their plays consisted almost entirely of characterisation with very little action. These aspects of characterisation--who they are and what they do--are important for the development of Aristotle's rules about the appropriate dramatic style for tragedy and comedy.

There are particular requirements in terms of propriety for tragic or comic characters, such that the stylistic separation between tragedy and comedy can also be discussed as part of the rule about conventionalised characters with respect to class distinctions. This tragedy/comedy split has adversely affected the reception of many plays by women who combined these styles in an attempt to represent a more wholistic cycle of life in their plays, a point I will discuss further in Part Four. Yet again they were criticised for not following the dramatic unities, lack of unified plot, and irrational or unrealistic subject matters. According to the founding fathers, the tragedy/comedy split in drama has

a didactic function for the lower classes, who become accustomed to misfortune by watching the upper classes suffer, while they gain pleasure from laughing at the misfortune of the lower classes. Yet this split between tragedy and comedy can be accused again of creative artifice rather than art imitating nature, since life cycles usually do not split tragedy and comedy so neatly between the classes. Further, on the question of the usefulness of tragedy (arousing grief) as opposed to comedy (arousing laughter), tragedy is presented as the catharsis of fear, pity, or immorality and is therefore didactic, but eventually the debate centers upon the skill of the poet and the rules of Art to control the passions aroused by tragedy.

Herrick points out that it was the influences of Horace and Cicero who insisted on its didactic function that led Robortellus to propose that tragedy offers a utilitarian function for those who are not heroes and kings:

> But when he comes to tragedy he argues that the spectator, by exposure to tragic drama, becomes accustomed to grief, fear, and pity, and consequently is less shaken by misfortune than is one who has not experienced the tragic emotions. Therefore, says Robortellus, the audience obtains a utility from tragedy; namely, this sustaining comfort whenever misfortune, the common lot of mortals, strikes. (42)

Herrick argues that tragic characters can also be embellished for this didactic purpose, and he refers to Willichius writing on the Poetics:

> Aristotle says that tragic poets should follow the example of the good portrait-painters, who preserve the likeness but make the subject handsomer than he is. Thus Willichius introduces the conception of imitation as an idealization of reality. (emphasis mine; 30)

The concept of idealisation of reality is echoed in Aristotle's distinction between comedy and tragedy from the Poetics: "that comedy makes its personages worse and tragedy better than average men" (qtd. in Herrick 53). In the context of Aristotle's assumptions about class and sex therefore, tragic drama about heroes and kings is to elevate the audience by exposing them to people who are "better than

average men", while comedy makes the lower classes feel better by laughing at those who are made "worse" than average men. Thus the imitation of 'reality' becomes the fictionalisation of reality with respect to character which helps to serve the didactic function of these dramatic styles.

Most commentators accepted Aristotle's dictum regarding the pleasure of grief and fear produced by tragedy. Nevertheless, one might well ask, says Herrick, paraphrasing Denores: "why should tragedy (which moves grief) rather than comedy (which moves laughter) please people?" (43). The answer Denores gives to this centers around the difficulty of the poet, and emphasises his skill:

> The answer lies, he believes, in the greater artificiality of tragedy, in the greater difficulties overcome by the tragic poet. This answer owes much to Aristotle, who argues, in the Poetics, that the best dramatic poet, i.e., the most artistic poet, is the one who relies upon the imitative, or creative, element in his work rather than upon verses or scenery. (emphasis mine; 43)

This interpretation anticipates the "theory of the difficulty overcome" (43), but surely deriving pleasure from tragedy for this reason relates more to the poet's own delight in his "artistic" skills to construct the more "dramatic" artificial tragedy--since the audience presumably are mostly less learned and would not even be able to appreciate this difficulty overcome. However, the pleasure referred to by Aristotle brings up the aspect of the audience's experience and here the debate centers around the Aristotelian notion of catharsis, in an attempt to reconcile the fundamental opposition between pleasure and learning.

There are some useful points to this debate as they affect the criticisms of women playwrights, who are so often accused of extreme emotionality, sentimentality or wild, passionate ravings of rage and violence. Although the predominant Aristotelian definition of catharsis is to purge emotions, it eventually becomes associated with "physiological" excitement so that its usefulness as a dramatic style is overridden by the moral necessity to

control emotions through reason so as to effect the most valuable learning. There are several interpretations of what Aristotle meant by catharsis in his definition of tragedy which is "incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions" (42). The pleasure of catharsis is variously seen by scholars as the purging of spectators' fear and pity, as a way of getting used to these emotions in misfortunes, and (the more modern and less favoured by interpretation) as a physiological experience of emotional excitement. While most sixteenth commentators try to interpret catharsis as a moral purging of emotions of either fear and pity, Madius was even more moral:

> How can pity and fear remove pity and fear? No, the tragic catharsis removes from the mind other, and evil, perturbations, such as wrath, avarice, luxury; and the removal of these evil passions allows the mind to become adorned with virtues. (43)

Herrick argues that one scholar, Robortellus, finds evidence in Aristotle's definitions that tragic catharsis is not didactic, but physiological with respect to excitement and emotions:

> Aristotle speaks of the excitement brought on by religious songs as comparable to a medicinal purge; he speaks of the harmless delight afforded by these purgative melodies. Thus Aristotle clearly indicates here a physiological, not a moral or didactic, interpretation; the catharsis effected by music is orgiastic rather than instructive. (emphasis mine; Herrick 42)

Herrick states that what Aristotle meant by catharsis has been debated for over four hundred years, in a project to reconcile its function as aesthetic and didactic. And this may be a significant indication of the difficulty in the struggle to control--through the methodologies of proper Art--the emotional or "orgiastic" experience of tragic catharsis in favour of the more accepted "reason" of learning, or the pleasure of comedy.

Yet in an interview with Jenny Rankin discussing women poets, Hewett argues that some writing may need to be more involved with letting go of control:

> What they write has its own immensely emotional

> drive, I do think that women tend to strip, or maybe they're at the stage of their development where it's necessary to strip the pretences away, to be very violent and passionate and wild about their sense of themselves, because they've never been allowed to be so, except perhaps Emily Bronte, who did it very nicely. But women need this, and therefore their poems tend to sometimes appear to fall apart by the very intensity of the emotional drive which they have to put into it to get through to what they want to say. (Hecate's Daughters, 1978, p 118-119)

I would suggest that the control of passion through the structural reins of traditional rules for 'art' functions to control more than abstract emotions, acting in particular to restrict the representations of explosive passion by those who are victims of socially repressed anger, violence and sexuality.

The next rule I want to mention briefly is the cautionary use of gods or the "supernatural" on stage, and the related condemnation of spectacle. So many contemporary women playwrights have been criticised for resorting to the unnatural or spectacle (unimportant expressionism), when they use exaggerated scenery, mythological creatures, gods and goddesses, and large representations relating to "femininity" such as walking vaginas, bras, huge children, and stoves. The dictum against these stylistic devices supposedly relates to the proper imitation of nature but, as I shall show, nature becomes linked with artistic control in the proper representation of reality and what is probable through history, thus further using an essentialist interpretation of nature to reinforce traditional social definitions. Herrick says that all the Classical authorities condemn the frequent use of of the deus ex machina which is the use of divine interference when matters involved are beyond human control, because this is seen "as contrary to art, nature, and probability" (96). But Aristotle's argument against divine intervention through the deus ex machina relates more to keeping artificiality out of the play. Yet Aristotle does say that the most artistic dramatist is the most creative, but when it comes to what he perceives as being outside of

nature, the play is considered more natural when the poet is in control of the resolution of the plot, rather than divine interference:

> Aristotle's argument is simply this: the artistic resolution of a plot should come from the plot itself, from the natural progression of probable events, and not from agents outside the plot, whether gods or not ... Castelvetro presents a sensible explanation ... he believes that Aristotle is objecting not only to the use of gods on the stage, but to the use of any miraculous agents that are contrary to nature. (Herrick 96-97)

However, beyond the element of poetic control, critics like Thomas Hobbes argued against the inclusion of preternatural elements in drama and epic poetry, emphasising the imitation of nature's possibilities, though this now becomes the "resemblance of truth" which is "the bound of the historical":

> There are some that are not pleased with fiction unless it be bold, not only to exceed the work, but also the possibility of nature: they would have impenetrable armors, enchanted castles, invulnerable bodies, iron men, flying horses, and a thousand other such things, which are easily feigned by them that dare. Against such I defend you ... by dissenting only from those that think the beauty of a poem consisteth in the exorbitancy of the fiction. For as truth is the bound of historical, so the resemblance of truth is the utmost limit of poetical liberty. In old time amongst the heathen such strange fictions and metamorphoses were not so remote from the articles of their faith as they are now from ours, and therefore were not so unpleasant. Beyond the actual works of nature a poet may now go; but beyond the conceived possibility of nature, never. (emphasis mine; qtd. in Herrick 98-99)

As Herrick has argued, Aristotelian imitation of nature is creative fictionalising, though "nature" now also becomes represented as imitating history. The slide from not exceeding the "possibilities of nature" to the poetic limits represented by the "resemblance of truth" as the "bound of the historical" is the continuing evolution of a way of thinking that ignores the fact of its own subjective interpretation of nature and reality. In seeking to represent universal reality it remains blind to its own false assumption that history itself is objectively 'real' and

therefore truth and, consequently, the best and proper realm for the poet. Further, the assumption that women are naturally without reason in Classical thought and the representation of them as such in the drama and poetry, continues and manifests itself in the 17th century as a truth that considers itself bound up in history rather than fiction. For women writers who might be trying to represent subject matters which are outside of "nature" or "historical truth" as defined by Classical tradition, there are words to use but simply no acceptable space within the context of a male-defined reality to insert such representations. Similarly, the seeming historical 'fact' that there are few women playwrights ignores the socioeconomic obstacles for woman writers, the lack of documentation on the many women playwrights who did produce plays, and the problematic effect upon women of the dominance of men in theatre, as Hewett points out:

> If you think about women playwrights in English Literature generally, there's not very many of us. I don't know what this says. Does it say that the whole mechanics of which plays are constructed are difficult for women? Does it say that they find it difficult to work within theatre structures? I think probably the second is true, that it's difficult to work because of the existing theatre structures and also maybe that intense co-operative effort is made difficult for women because of their past experiences and timidity. (Hecate 119)

Thus the difficulty for women may not only be in writing against a dominant tradition of stylistic rules, but also in the problem of working and producing in existing theatre structures dominated in numbers by men.

Similar to the dictum against the unnatural or the supernatural, a rule which devalues enchantment literature, science fiction and other forms of what might be called "extreme" fiction that are outside the "conceived possibility" of nature and history, the rule that spectacle is the least artistic element in theatre follows as a logical assumption if nature is not considered as spectacle, but it is more likely to be the case that spectacle is seen as

"easy" and not really due to any artistic skill. As Hobbes said, fiction that "exceed[s] the work ... is easily feigned by them who dares" (98), which implies that it is more difficult and more literary to imitate nature and the truth of history, but that one must be merely daring to move out of the prescribed standards. In the same way spectacle is seen as in rather bad taste and not really stimulating the audience through the prescribed methods of poetic imitation. Horace protests against the "appearance on stage of horrible and incredible spectacles" and emphasises "the offense to good taste, to decorum" (99), but Aristotle's Poetics refers to the skill of the poet:

> The tragic fear and pity may be aroused by the Spectacle; but they may also be aroused by the very structure and incidents of the play--which is the better way and shows the better poet ... Those, however, who make use of the Spectacle to put before us that which is merely monstrous and not productive of fear, are wholly out of touch with Tragedy; not every kind of pleasure should be required of a tragedy, but only its own proper pleasure. (emphasis mine; qtd. in Herrick 99)

The objection by the Classical authorities to the "artifice" of the supernatural or spectacle may be more evidence of their struggle to balance contradictory definitions of poetic skill: on the one hand, imitating nature for authority within the rules of the doctrine of decorum, and on the other simultaneously being creative and artistic--nature as opposed to artifice. In the space of dramatic rules this contradiction implies that being the most creative is not necessarily being the most artistic, although Aristotle states this as so. One must be creative within the rules of skill, and therefore the lofty task of imitating nature really consists of definitive, arbitrary rules for craft work. Considering assumptions that the pleasure of tragedy lies in the theory of the poet's difficulty overcome; the emphasis on the poet to be in control of the plot resolution; and the importance of the skill of the poet to arouse fear and pity through structure and incidents; it is more likely that "imitating nature" really functions to give Authority to

the artifice of fictionalising 'reality' and 'Truth'. The struggle to elevate artistic creation using the imitation of nature and the representation of historical truth consequently serves to grant the poet power and the status of a "second deity", rather than that of a mere fictionaliser. The purpose of the dramatic rules, then, would be to achieve a set of requirements with which to measure literary skill as artists; fulfilling the didactic function of art by containing unruly passion, mere fantasy or spectacle within a structure that dictates the greatest poets would be imparting wisdom to the less intelligent masses, and quite possibly also achieving god-like immortality, in the process of establishing a dominant tradition.

Section (B). Knowledge, Gender and the Aristotelian Worldview

The famous Aristotelian dicta are in one sense an arbitrary set of standards, yet they are derived from fundamental perspectives within a particular worldview. It is important to deconstruct the metaphysical assumptions underlying these traditional standards because, as Sue-Ellen Case points out, "the seemingly dramatic standards which select playwrights in the canon are actually the same patriarchal biases which organize the economy and social organization of the culture at large" (qtd. in Dolan 319). Thus metaphysics is in the lived social world as Nancy Passmore writes in The Politics of Women's Spirituality:

> Every facet of Western metaphysical thought assumes a separation: material/spiritual, male/female, nomena/phenomena, infinite/finite, ad infinitum! All 'approved' knowledge is based on implicit metaphysics as well as empirical reality ... Literacy, and the whole Aristotelian, patriarchal worldview, tends to categorize, to label, to name, and to impose a linear quality upon our perceptions of reality. Even the act of reading/writing compartmentalizes logic, meaning, and the resultant worldview or reality-picture into segments that appear to occur sequentially, further reinforcing linear thinking. (166-167)

I will show how the Aristotelian metaphysics of this historical tradition of standards contributed to the gender biased value judgements made in critical practices, as well as resulting in a masculine positivity of critical terms. This makes it nearly impossible to find value in women's texts that do not fit within these definitions and creates enormous difficulties for women writers. Further, the broader context of these standards which depend upon the belief system of women as inferior opposites, requires an addressing of the underlying philosophical structures that produce such dominance in the social construction of Knowledge, meaning, and power. These structures, including Aristotelian logic, the law of non-contradiction and a metaphysics of binary opposites, have not only contributed to the formation of a masculinist tradition in the (hu)man discourse in which women are represented as inferior

opposites, they also expose power as dominance in the control of representation and the construction of ideology. This can be shown through a deconstructionist and feminist critique of dominance as it manifests in the metaphysical split between male/reason/public and female/emotional/private; of the dominance in philosophy and Knowledge which excludes contradiction and represses the indeterminable in the construction of meaning; of the dominance of meaning in a politics of interpretation where "correctness" is based on the authority of 'real' experience; of the dominance of metaphysics and rigorous objectivity as a platform of power for institutional control of representation in the production of naturalised ideologies; and in the construction of identity where the dominant emphasis has shifted from resemblance to difference. Thus in this section I will explore the relationship between the metaphysics of Knowledge, gender and the Aristotelian worldview in order to deconstruct dominance as it manifests in the philosophical structures that have produced the identity of the (hu)man discourse.

Obviously if art is inspiration arising from a "nature" that is common to us all, then anyone can be inspired and produce art. However, as I have shown in Section (A), "The Gods of Great Drama: Imitation or Creation?", the didactic function of art, poetry and drama which requires the poet's learning and wisdom in order to be good writing, necessarily excludes those in society who are excluded from learning because they are thought not to possess reason; and these are slaves and women. As Case points out in Feminist Theatre, "this idea is articulated in Aristotle's Politics: 'the slave has no deliberative faculty at all; the woman has, but it is without authority'" (18). The faculty of reason, which is interpreted as an essential quality located in the male rather than a construct available to all, thus becomes an important pivotal point for distinguishing who is capable of the possibility of philosophy, since it is the use of reason that shifts knowledge beyond individual experience to a

knowledge of the universal. Herrick discusses this distinction in learning, noting that "as Aristotle says in his Metaphysics, all men desire to know", but points out that, according to Robortellus, "all men do not learn in the same way" (32):

> Ignorant men learn by particulars. Wise men, philosophers, learn by universals as well. Thus the common man who views a work of imitation, a picture or a carving, recognizes only the particulars, the particulars which he has already experienced. The philosophical observer, however, joins the universal with the particular and exercises his reason. (emphasis mine; 32)

The poet is not just an imitator, but a creator; not just inspired by nature, but an interpreter of it; and what facilitates the greater art is the poet's own reason and wisdom which allows him (sic) to philosophise "universal" knowledge, as distinguished from mere recognition of the particulars based on real experiences.

However, Grene argues in A Portrait of Aristotle that there is a major contradiction running through the construction of what objects constitute Knowledge, stated by Aristotle as those which must be real and universal. Yet as stated above particulars are "real" and therefore not objects of universal wisdom. Grene points out that Plato believed physical reality was not stable; that only general conceptions, or universals, could be the true objects of knowledge:

> The flowing world of sense, Plato believed, lacks the stability of the purely knowable; it flits by, dreamlike, taking shape with every man's illusion. Only general conceptions, not this man but humanity, not this pleasure but good itself, are knowable. Such generals, of course, for Plato were Forms.... (24)

Aristotle agreed with his teacher that objects of knowledge must be permanent and stable to be real, and therefore only universals are objects of knowledge. However, Aristotle contradicted himself arguing that only individuals are fully real ("this man, this horse", 24). Since individuals are constantly changing particulars, how can they be 'real' objects of knowledge that must be unchanging and universal?

Grene puts it this way:

> But particulars, except in the heavens, change size and shape and quality as well as place, are born and die. Only universals are objects of knowledge. Yet Aristotle did deny the reality of the Platonic Forms; only individuals, he insists again and again in the Metaphysics, are fully real. Beings in the primary, the genuine sense are individual things such as this man, this horse, this ox ... So once more, Aristotle, most meticulous of dialecticians, seems to be asserting, within the compass of a given work: knowledge is of the real and universal; but whatever is real is not universal; therefore if knowledge is of the real it is not of the universal, if of the universal, not of the real. Yet knowledge by definition must be both. (24)

As Grene points out, Aristotle himself argued laboriously in the Book Gamma "that the Law of Non-Contradiction is fundamental to all meaningful discourse. No meaningful proposition can assert of the same subject in the same respect an attribute and its opposite" (emphasis mine; 24-25). As Grene says "when we put his statements about universality and knowledge and reality alongside one another, he himself seems to be doing just that" (25). What is at stake here, illustrated by contradiction, is not only the limitations of defining objects of universal knowledge, but the indeterminacy of what is real.

According to Grene, Aristotle's basis for the determination of knowledge depends upon a theory of representation that reflects a stable reality, with fixed positions and stateable essences. Grene discusses the basis of demonstrable knowledge in A Portrait of Aristotle, where she points out that Aristotelian definitions are problematic:

> Aristotle argues that demonstrative knowledge must be bounded in three directions. It must begin from fixed premises and move through a finite number of middle terms to precise and definite conclusions. A science is not infinitely expandable in any of these three directions, because what it exhibits is itself a finite structure, the essence of a natural group of individuals. Thus, once more, science depends for its possibility on the fact that things have essences, what's stateable in definitions. (95)

Representation can be considered as a structural mode with a

binary sign system whereby the orientation of definitions is produced within a logic of inferior/superior, center and margin, and the elimination of contradiction to preserve a homogenous identity. The sign as a binary structure produces a tendency to create definitions by privileging one aspect of a so-called opposition over another, according to the subjective beliefs of the representer. However, those aspects which seem exactly oppositional (black/white) within a structure depend upon an observer positioned at the centre where the gaze along a linear line then defines the black area and the white area. As soon as the position of the observer shifts from that relative centre to the margins (the grey area) or across defining boundaries into another structure, that particular linear perspective is lost and the notion of centre and opposites collapses into differences or distinctions in a field. In this sense, the concept of a relative centre represents a similar conceptual shift to the discoveries of Copernicus, as Smith observes in Subject Woman:

> The significance of Copernican innovations was less that the sun rather than the earth was declared to be the centre of the solar system than that the position of the observer was no longer fixed and could no longer be disattended in interpreting observations. (qtd. in Oakley 325)

This displacement of the fixed position--i.e. relativity--creates the lack of stability from which an interpreter makes observations, and has major consequences for the Aristotelian basis of scientific discourse and the determination of Knowledge. The lack of a fixed premise from which to begin and end, as well as the problematic notion of fixed essences in an environment which, both as quantum physics and the social sciences show, is an interrelated, constantly changing 'web' of uncertain relations, thus presents an impossibility of assuming a definite, stable position in science or any other discourse. Thus the philosophical dichotomies mentioned earlier that rely upon the notion of essences, stability, and rigid boundaries dissolve into an intertextual field of relative perspectives, so that the "nature" of

oppositions depends upon the observer's position.

In the production of universal knowledge by defining the 'real', a metaphysics of opposites has been the basis for philosophical discourse in the construction of meaning and Truth in which the logic of the law of non-contradiction eliminates contradiction and opposites to determine meaning or establish and maintain a homogeneous identity. In this sense, the opposites are part of the location of differences for the purposes of determining order. In The Pirate's Fiancée, Morris discusses Le Doeuff's Women and Philosophy which argues that the metaphysics of opposites has been a means of signifying difference as part of creating philosophical discourse:

> for Le Doeuff, the image of other (as dark continent, disorder, depth of the unintelligible, internal enemy and so on) is only one of a series of Others produced by philosophy in its process of self-definition. The child, the people, the savage and the pre-Socratics also come in for their fair share of alienation. Nevertheless, the figure of the feminine is extremely important. Not only does it appear to be a feature of the oldest metaphysics (as in Hegel's listing of Pythagorian oppositions; limit/infinity, unity/multiplicity, masculine/feminine, light/darkness, good/evil), but it also serves as a means of signifying a difference which creates philosophical discourse. (91)

Without a stable 'reality' though, the location of opposites collapses into mere significations of difference, and the certainty of meaning in such a project becomes impossible. However, according to Le Doeuff, certainty within philosophical discourse is achieved through historical exclusion and the repression of the indeterminable, in order to make itself definite:

> It is too simplistic, she argues, merely to list the various historical exclusions of philosophy (rhetoric, seductive discourse, occultism). The fact that philosophy is a discipline, claiming to obey a finite stock of procedural rules and operations, indicates that something is repressed within it. The point is rather that what philosophical discourse labours to exclude must be--and must remain--something indeterminable: 'It is not, and cannot be [determined], since either

> it is precisely the indefinite, or else philosophy amounts to the formal postulate that a practice of exclusion, a discipline of discourse, is necessary in order for the permitted modes of thought not to remain themselves indefinite. This then would constitute a general form of exclusion, one capable of being given a certain number of different contents, without itself being consubstantial with any one particular content'. (Le Doeuff qtd. in Morris 91)

The practice of exclusion of the indeterminable in whatever form (woman, slave, or savage), is, as Le Doeuff points out, necessary in order for those "permitted modes of thought not to remain themselves indefinite" (91). Knowledge as a project of philosophical order, is not the provable substance of Reality and Truth, but functions as the interpretation of permitted modes of thought that repress uncertainty through the exclusion of contradiction--and this means locating differences within a structure of oppositions that must be maintained. One of these is the reason/emotion opposition located in the (hu)man/woman dichotomy.

As mentioned earlier, the production of philosophical knowledge is based upon the faculty of reason. The concept of rationality, as a located opposite within the dichotomy between reason/unreason, has been responsible for excluding women from philosophy and the literary traditions of 'great' writing. Its location as a masculine faculty, exercised according to rules and structures of philosophy, has also driven feminists away from 'theory' as it is perceived as essentially a patriarchal discourse. Le Doeuff directs two critiques of rationality, which, as Morris says, "work precisely by accepting the equation femininity = unreason, and by giving it a positive political value" (90). Morris claims that one critique is aimed against the statement by Guy Lardreau in L'Ange, "that slaves and women are indeed without reason, that 'when a slave, as slave, or a woman, as woman, reasons about slaves or women, this reasoning can only be an unreason'" (90), for this implies that "any autonomous discourse of the rebel must make itself heard in the irruption of unreason" (90). Lardreau says his

"announcement" is made in the name of "Greek frankness" (90) but Morris and Le Doeuff reply thus:

> knowledge about women has always been masculine property, 'in which case L'Ange is not announcing anything'; and that it is time to return, not to Greek frankness, but to an elementary historical materialism capable of recalling that slave societies proclaim the unreason of the slave, and patriarchal societies fondly repeat that woman, dear creature, lacks reason. (90)

The second critique of rationality by Le Doeuff undermines:

> 'a certain feminism of difference which seems unaware of its debt to Auguste Comte'--the position that rationality is indeed a masculine property, that therefore philosophical discourse is traversed by masculine values, and that women must seek their own specificity and their own discourse. (90)

The acceptance by feminism that rationality is essentially male is thus the force behind the move to escape philosophy in order to discover or create a female discourse. Morris paraphrases Le Doeuff's reversal of the argument as she critiques this acceptance of an essential 'male' rationality:

> from the fact that philosophical discourse has often been structured by a misogynist imaginary, it does not necessarily follow that 'rationality' is a masculine privilege. She then develops a two-sided counter position: (i) it is all to easy to overestimate the influence of philosophical representations of femininity, and thus to accept philosophy's myths about its own powers and importance; (ii) when the mystifications which are produced by philosophy come under attack--for example, the positivist image of women as morally superior and theoretically deficient--then it is the practice, and not the refusal, of philosophy which can provide the necessary (if insufficient) critical means for ousting and unmasking the alienating schemas which philosophy produces. (second emphasis mine; 90)

Though feminism might want to produce a different kind of philosophy that does not reproduce knowledge based on oppositions, its occasional refusal to participate in philosophy and theoretical discourse because this is seen as patriarchal, merely perpetuates the location of reason and theory within the realm of the masculine. The position that breaks down this dichotomy of reason/unreason and

reason/emotion is the excluded middle denied by Aristotelian either/or logic--precisely the exercise of reason by women, and the exercise of emotion by men that displaces the location of these qualities and renders them meaningless as opposites. Ronald de Sousa discusses this boundary breakdown in his introduction to The Rationality of Emotion, where he argues that not only are these qualities not opposite, nor restricted to either the male or female location, but that they are interrelated and operational simultaneously within the exercising of either faculty:

> Despite a common prejudice, reason and emotion are not natural antagonists. On the contrary: I shall argue that when the calculi of reason have become sufficiently sophisticated, they would be powerless in their own terms, except for the contribution of emotion. For emotions are among the mechanisms that control the crucial factor of salience among what would otherwise be an unmanageable plethora of objects of attention, interpretations, and strategies of inference and conduct. What remains of the old opposition between reason and emotion is only this: emotions are not reducible to beliefs or to wants. (xv-xvi)

Michael Ryan, in Marxism and Deconstruction also argues against the reason/unreason opposition, saying that "for feminism, a similar reversal and displacement of a purely theoretical position is conceivable" (121). He discusses men's detachment from female violence and "hysteria" especially when it is directed against male rationality and domination because:

> Men know (that is, can theorize, envision, overlook, and oversee) what feminine "hysteria" is about. They believe it is an untheorized practice, an unconscious rage that has not been elevated to theoretical consciousness and thereby controlled. (not my emphasis; 121)

Male theorising in the psychiatric discourse about feminine "hysteria" referred to it as a mental and physical disease as evidenced in A Dictionary of Psychological Medicine, edited by Daniel Hack Tuke:

> A consideration of the main facts called hysterical will indicate the general definition of hysteria in its physical basis as a disorder or defective development of the functionally higher

> layers of the cerebral cortex, with manifestations of both mental and bodily phenomena in varying proportion, and occurring mostly in the female sex. (vol. 1, 1976, p 619)

The medical profession did not take women's complaints about their position in society seriously nor question whether the "hysteria" was produced by cultural structures of oppression, nor did they consider men's symptoms of emotional and mental distress from shell shock as similar to hysteria. Instead the traditional dichotomies were maintained and hysteria was seen as evidence of an essential quality of feminine unreason, an assumption that was also exhibited in the popular press:

> A fashionable German physician named Wiederhold is doing three months imprisonment for having belaboured a nervous lady patient with a stick as she lay in bed. The doctor defended his course of treatment on the ground that stick was the only effective cure for hysteria, a theory which deserves the consideration of all who have had any experience of lovely woman when the spirit moves her to shut her eyes and shriek. (Bulletin, Sydney, 9 July 1892, p 15)

Ryan argues that deconstruction would focus in on this exclusion of "hysteria" from the male position of rationality:

> Might not the self-monumentalizing paralysis of rational rigor (mortis) itself be an effect of what it excludes as feminine 'hysteria'? In other words, the hierarchy of male reason and female unreason could be reversed. Feminine 'hysteria', rather than male coercive self-control, then becomes the sign of moral and philosophical goodness. (121)

By defining rational control as an effect of hysteria which has been excluded as unacceptable and unreasonable emotions, the oppositions are displaced and "the poles of expressive violence and implosive control would be seen to pass into each other" (121):

> Male theoretical detachment in the face of feminine "hysteria" is, like all theory that succeeds always in balancing all the equations, simply a less evident form of hysteria and violence. And "female" hysteria might be a "rational," therapeutic, and potentially revolutionary form of violence. (121)

Despite all the traditional definitions of male rationality and female emotionality, and the great poet's need for reason to control passion and express universality, according to Herrick, Aristotle also writes that "'poetry demands a man with a special gift for it, or else one with a touch of madness in him'" (9). In light of the extensive textual evidence to suppress unruly passion, uncontrolled emotions, and certainly the madness of unnatural spectacle, this statement is perhaps the final irony.

In the construction of Knowledge, when representation is controlled by the construction of meaning through the elimination of contradiction--it is a project necessarily involved in repression, and domination in the construction of ideology. Gayatri Spivak suggests the domination of meaning underlies the politics of interpretation in her collection of essays, In Other Worlds:

> When Kristeva writes 'this abject awakens in the one who speaks archaic conflicts with his own improper objects, his ab-jects, at the edge of meaning, at the limits of the interpretable [and] it arouses the paranoid rage to dominate those objects, to transform them', she is writing not only of Céline's anti-Semitism, but also of the revolutionary impulse (p. 91). What is at stake here is a politics of interpretation. (128)

Similar to Le Doeuff's argument that what is repressed in philosophy is the indeterminable, a politics of interpretation represses contradiction to eliminate the fear of uncertainty and the lack of a fixed position hovering at the margins of meaninglessness. The domination of meaning is a project to locate in static form--the word, the correct interpretation, the Truth--what is really an ongoing, relative and subjective interaction that occurs through dialogue. In this sense, naming becomes power that is sustained through erasure and the control of representation. This domination of meaning in the (hu)man discourse privileges a practice of criticism centered around a politics of interpretation that more often works to preserve the identity of the discourse because the power to be "correct" is based on the authority of 'real' experience. Hence the

criticisms of women playwrights who were attacked for their inadequate knowledge and "experience" of the real world. In Jardine's play from Grafts, Feminist Questions d'apres gynesis, published in Susan Sheridan's recent collection, Feminist Cultural Criticism, she quotes Jane Gallop's argument that such a politics is inherently conservative:

> But then 'belief in simple referentiality is not only unpoetic but also ultimately politically conservative, because it cannot recognize that the reality to which it appeals is a traditional ideological construction, whether one terms it phallomorphic, or metaphysical, or bourgeois, or something else. The politics of experience is inevitably a conservative politics for it cannot help but conserve traditional ideological constructs which are not recognized as such but are taken for the "real"'. (175)

Therefore those critics (and writers) with experiences privileged by the identity of the discourse more often contribute to maintaining the status quo, while those writers and critics who lack experience are considered without authority. Thus the masculinist identity that privileges male experience in the public realm is preserved by writers and critics, (generally male, or females who corroborate traditional gender roles), who can best interpret the universal wisdom in the representation of these experiences.

In this sense, critical practices of interpretation function to control representation such that by the historical force of tradition, the ideologies of the discourse become naturalised and self-evident. However, according to Spivak, this politics of interpretation is based on a notion of ideology that denies the process of "historical sedimentation", and regards the subject as "freely willing" and "consciously choosing" against a "world seen as background":

> It is difficult to speak of a politics of interpretation without a working notion of ideology as larger than the concepts of individual consciousness and will. At its broadest implications this notion of ideology would undo the oppositions between determinism and free will and between conscious choice and unconscious reflex. Ideology in action is what a group takes

> to be natural and self-evident, that of which the group, as a group, must deny any historical sedimentation. It is both the condition and the effect of the constitution of the subject (of ideology) as freely willing and consciously choosing in a world that is seen as background. In turn, the subject(s) of ideology are the conditions and effects of the self-identity of the group as a group. It is impossible, of course, to mark off a group as an entity without sharing complicity with its ideological definition. A persistent critique of ideology is thus forever incomplete. (emphasis mine; In Other Worlds 118)

To go beyond a politics of interpretation requires a broader notion of ideology "that would of course situate the merely conceptual framework within a more extended and heterogeneous field" (118). In the heterogeneous field, the subject and the world are part of an intertextual field such that the element of dialogue within groups, and among groups, rather than erasure, becomes important to prevent the historical sedimentation of "natural" or "self-evident" reality constructs. Thus the formation of knowledge is forever involved in a continual process of ideological reform and critique; with subjects operating to understand their own complicity as flexible, interrelated positions rather than by polarisation into opposition, and the struggle for dominance.

As Ryan puts it in Marxism and Deconstruction, the metaphysics behind a politics of interpretion may be rooted in something other than an innocent desire for knowledge or meaning:

> But that rigorous identity and absolute truth--in metaphysical rationalism with its firm categorical divisions and strict objectivism--may merely be an excuse for power. (211)

While representation as a theoretical structure has been passed off as a reflection of objective reality, intertextually in discourse it participates in creating reality constructs through ideology. What seems "natural" or "real" is thus an ideological construct reached either as communication agreements between interacting subjects in the process of dialogue, or by force through the power of a particular group to dominate the use of representation.

Institutionalised knowledge produced by the domination of meaning, with authority vested in those who control representation, is not self-reflexive when it erases texts and refuses dialogue, nor is it disinterested in its own power when it refuses to acknowledge its own complicity in the production of ideology and structural power differentials. Analysing erasure as a tool of dominance in the (hu)man discourse then, requires understanding the way representation in language is itself a dominating structure, as well as deconstructing how it has been controlled, and by whom, to create specific kinds of privileged reality constructs which, in a will to power are then imposed upon others using the force of erasure and exclusion; without dialogue, without agreement. The structure of power as dominance is hierarchical and falsely based on an assumed superiority that favours one aspect of an opposition and results in dominance over those perceived as inferior others. The dominant entity will always defend its own identity by exaggerating the differences it locates in perceived inferiors, while simultaneously suppressing within itself its resemblance to the 'others', in a lack of self-reflexivity. What may be in question, then, when addressing erasure in the (hu)man discourse, is a non-reflexive criticism based on a politics of interpretation that determines meaning and value using a fixed subject-object (critic-text) position, as compared to what Spivak refers to as:

> a position that today would call itself the politics of textuality, seeing that the network of politics-history-society-sexuality, and the like, defines itself in ideology by acknowledging a textual or weblike structure. (In Other Worlds 121)

Rather than being a project to determine the correct interpretation of an objective reality, a politics of textuality regards meanings as constantly negotiated in a weblike structure through representation, and thus can be interested in self-reflexivity and its own complicity in the production of reality constructs, a practice and politics of criticism which I will discuss further in Parts Three and

Four.

Having looked at how gender definitions of masculinity have permeated the (hu)man discourse through the dramatic rules for good writing and the philosophical structures of Knowledge, I will next discuss a feminist analysis of how this discourse identity affects and limits the woman playwright and the woman writer in terms of her ability to express difference, with respect to style or gender, and how the critical language of masculine positivity has supported gender biased criticism. Case argues that the dramatic rules, by their criteria, have stereotyped and excluded women as characters, spectators, and dramatists. They are supposed to help the poet create the appropriate style for presenting subject matter, and the right characterisation combined with the properly constructed plot will help the poet in his "imitation" of a probable reality. But these standards have privileged action through plot; supported distinctions of class and gender; imposed the unification of time and space through the dramatic unities; privileged the homogeneity of character in conventionalisation; linearised narrative as the breaking up of daily cycles into compartmentalised segments with fixed conclusions; and through decorum and proper style have controlled representation by privileging reason over the disorder of unruly passions, spectacle, the unnatural or the supernatural. Case points out in Feminism and Theatre that Aristotle's requirement for characters to be good is a moral imperative which excludes women:

> 'In connection with the characters ... first and most important, that they be good ... but goodness exists in each class of people: there is in fact such a thing as a good woman and such a thing as a good slave, although no doubt one of these classes is inferior and the other, as a class, is worthless'. (qtd. in Case 16)

The absence of the male in this discussion "illustrates that the male citizen is the standard of good, but that this quality may even be found in others" (16). The tragic character must be good, and therefore, women and slaves cannot be the subject of tragedy, which is the most didactic

form of drama for the lower classes. The requirement for appropriate action according to character again restricts women from the higher realms of drama, since tragic heroes must be noble, good, and exhibit bravery and intellectual abilities:

> 'for it is possible for a person to be manly in terms of character, but it is not appropriate for a woman to exhibit either this quality or the intellectual cleverness that is associated with men'. (Aristotle qtd. in Case 17)

Case argues that there are several translations of the Poetics where the term manly is used interchangeably with terms like brave or clever so that the male gender, bravery and cleverness become synonomous. Gender-specific Aristotelian assumptions prefigure the theory of the inferior other and therefore:

> rest upon the intersection of social reality and aesthetic prescriptions. In both realms, women are the outsiders. They function only to provide the limits of the male subject, which help to complete his outline, or they illustrate differences from him, which highlight his qualities. (Case 17)

It is important to add that the "social reality" referred to is in fact the masculinist interpretation or version of what women and slaves are, not an objective reality. Case also points out that women's lack of character not only restricts them within the dramatic text, but affects their entire experience of drama and art as spectators:

> Aristotle links the act of representation to the pleasure of learning, both for the artist and for those who view his art ... The pleasure of mimesis is didactic, and learning is linked to the enjoyment-reception of its product. Since cleverness is gender-specific to the male, the enjoyment of art may be restricted to his province. (18)

In Aristotle's system, thought is to facilitate correct choices, and pity, fear and recognition in the drama helps teach audiences about correct choices (18). Without cleverness, women lack the ability to make such choices and, in The Politics, Aristotle states that since women have no authority of choice and no cleverness, they are silenced:

> Morever, even dialogue would seem to be outside

> their realm - for, without authority, speaking is inappropriate, as the same passage in The Politics goes on to argue: 'the courage of a man is shown in commanding, but of a woman in obeying ... as the poet says "Silence is a woman's glory", but this is not equally the glory of a man'. (18)

Therefore, Case argues that in Aristotle's system, the drama has no function for women either as spectators or writers.

Traditional dramatic standards, combined with a predominant masculinist identity that privileges the public sphere, have functioned as the authoritative basis for judgement in the field of literary criticism with severe consequences for the representations of women. Women writers have been restricted by the limits of stereotyped characterisation, and their representable experiences, which Joanna Russ refers to as acceptable myths and heroines in her article "What Can a Heroine Do? or Why Women Can't Write" from Woman as Writer. She makes the point that women who do not write within the limits of male myths, but instead develop alternative styles, structures and myths, are prone to become "outsiders" and their writing is "always in critical jeopardy" (161). She suggests two alternatives:

> There seem to me to be two alternatives open to the woman author who no longer cares about How She Fell in Love or How She Went Mad. These are (1) lyricism, and (2) life. By 'lyricism' I do not mean purple passages or baroque raptures; I mean a particular principle of structure. (158)

While not every woman wants to write in the lyric mode, nor should she have to, Russ does make some interesting points about how that structure works against the prescribed elements of traditional narrative and drama:

> If the narrative mode (what Aristotle called 'epic') concerns itself with events connected by the chronological order in which they occur, and the dramatic mode with voluntary human actions which are connected both by chronology and causation, then the principle of construction I wish to call lyric consists of the organization of discrete elements (images, events, scenes, passages, words, what-have-you) around an unspoken thematic or emotional center. The lyric mode exists without chronology or causation; its principle of connection is associative. (emphasis by Russ; 158)

In this sense, Russ says that "the invisible center is what the novel or poem is about" because (158):

> it is also unsayable in available dramatic or narrative terms. That is, there is no action possible to the central character and no series of events which will embody in clear, unequivocal, immediately graspable terms what the artist means. (158)

Of course, "what the artist means" or "what the novel is about" are always problematic since they are never fully available from the text and are subjective interpretations. Yet, the decentered, associative style Russ discusses is even more outside of the prescribed dramatic structure and, therefore, seems unaccessible in the traditional critical terms. As an example of this mode, Russ refers to Virginia Woolf who she says is criticised for the fact that "nothing happens" in her novels, with the "usual vocabulary of denigration: these novels lack important events, they are hermetically sealed; they are too full of sensibility; they are trivial; they lack action; they are feminine" (159). The other alternative beside that of the lyric mode is "life", or what Russ describes as moving out of male myths and writing from "structure of one's own experience" (159), but this too has problems:

> How to write a novel about a person to whom nothing happens? A person to whom nothing but a love story is <u>supposed</u> to happen? A person inhabiting a world in which the only reality is frustration or endurance--or these plus an unbearably mystifying confusion? (159)

In writing about experiences which do not flow chronologically or resolve climactically, Russ suggests that women's texts are subject to being received as "formless" or "inexperienced":

> obviously life is not like <u>that</u>; life is not messy and indecisive; we know what life (and novels) are from Aristotle--who wrote about plays--and male novelists who employ male myths <u>created by a culture that imagines itself from the male point of view</u>. (emphasis mine; 159)

It is important to remember that the male point of view is also a social construct, and that this version of reality or

myth is not an essentially male perspective, but rather a conditioned masculinist position. Nevertheless, despite the difficulty of author based criticism which located writing as emerging from any one author's experience, critics have privileged the masculine version of representation:

> It is a commonplace criticism that only the male myths are valid or interesting; a book as fine (and well-structured) as Jane Eyre fails even to be seen by many critics because it grows out of experiences--events, fantasies, wishes, fears, daydreams, images of self--entirely foreign to their own. As critics are usually unwilling to believe their lack of understanding to be their own fault, it becomes the fault of the book. Of the author. Of all women writers. (last emphasis mine; 159)

Critics who rely on what is traditionally accepted, or their own ideological belief systems, will always have difficulty in relating to a text that is different, or which represents what is outside of their immediately understandable realm of experience. And in this sense, perhaps the lack of space for what is different makes its existence more difficult, as Russ intimates: "make something unspeakable, and you make it unthinkable" (160).

Since "insiders" know "perfectly well that art ought to match their ideas of it" while "outsiders" end up with critical problems, Russ argues that some writers have attempted to place their different myths within genres where the "reality" represented is also outside of the traditional patriarchal realm. These areas are detective stories, supernatural fiction, and science fiction, which we know from the Classical authorities do not require as much skill as the artistry of writing within literary propriety. However, Russ argues that these genres are influenced by Medieval patterns of fiction which dramatise a more collective social organisation:

> I think the resemblance lies in that medieval literature so often dramatizes not people's social roles but the life of the soul ... Science fiction, political fiction, parable, allegory, exemplum--all carry a heavier intellectual freight (and self-consciously so) than we are used to. All are didactic. All imply that human problems are

> collective, as well as individual, and take these problems to be spiritual, social, perceptive, or cognitive--not the fictionally sex-linked problems of success, competition, castration, education, love, or even personal identity with which we are all so familiar. (emphasis mine; 162)

Certainly Russ makes some sweeping generalisations and, in a sense, all representations of human problems are fictional whether they are collective or individual. But her argument that the (hu)man discourse does not critically validate myths which deal with experiences outside of those that have been "fictionally sex-linked" is a reasonable one:

> Our current fictional myths leave vast areas of human experience unexplored: work for one, genuine religous experience for another, and above all the lives of the traditionally voiceless, the vast majority of whom are women. (163)

She concludes her argument by saying that "women cannot write--using the old myths" because the old myths are fatal. She writes of the interrelationship of myth and gender role as constructed through the intertextual network of text and social practice:

> Our traditions, our books, our morals, our manners, our films, our speech, our economic organization, everything we have inherited, tells us that to be a Man one must bend Nature to one's will--or other men. This means ecological catastrophe in the first instance and war in the second. To be a Woman, one must be first and foremost a mother and after that a server of Men; this means overpopulation and the perpetuation of the first two disasters. The roles are deadly. The myths that serve them are fatal. (163)

Although these myths are "fatal", the difficulty is in creating new myths that can interact within the intertextual field of discourse, without being subjected to erasure. In Gender and Transition, Alice Eichholz discusses Mark Gerzon's interesting suggestions for alternatives to the old roles for heroes which he divides as belonging to the public and private sphere:

> The two public archetypes he presents are the Frontiersman, the one who alone conquers the earth and tames the forests, and the Soldier, the protector who abuses his body in order to defend ... Gerzon describes the balance between these two

> public heroes of Frontiersman and Soldier as peace-loving champions of freedom ready to kill to prove it. (292)

Gerzon comes up with some alternatives to the 'normal' hero:

> For the Frontiersman, the less defended hero who is capable of interdependence is the Healer, with a commitment to healing the wounds in the earth made by the Frontiersman. The choice instead of the Soldier is the Mediator, able to hear contrary points of view and understand the 'enemy' because he understands himself from within rather than projecting it onto others. Rather than work coming first for the Breadwinner, the choice is Companion, who has the opportunity to share in work, love, and family. In the workplace and education, rather than the Expert, the choice is that of Colleague, one who values all contributions and skills, realizing everyone's expertise in their own experience. Finally, rather than the Lord representing that distanced role of responding to hurt and pain, whether spiritual, psychic, or physical, the Nurturer understands the closeness and humanity necessary in healing, including his own. (293)

Eichholz points out that many of these new choices for heroes incorporate qualities which have been the traditional domain for the feminine gender, as Manhood is an increasingly aggressively challenged concept. In this respect men and the masculine gender construct also become the subjects of feminism, rather than mere onlookers upon a feminism that only 'liberates' women from the domestic sphere and leaves male-dominant power structures unchallenged. And in the face of increasing domestic and public violence, there is a crisis of confidence about heroes, and about leaders in whom people have invested their safety and security, leading to an unspoken and almost unconscious disappointment:

> 'These heroes don't do what I thought they would. They don't protect me or my children. They can't. There must be an alternative'. (294)

Quite rightly though, in an economy based on the old heroes, Eichholz she says that "how these choices become real options is the challenge" (293).

Although the (hu)man discourse employs gender biased criticism derived from the Aristotelian tradition, masculine positivity in critical language also supports and contributes

to this gender bias which makes it nearly impossible to have positive words to describe women's writing. In The American Woman Playwright, Olauson lists some of the socially conditioned assumptions about gender as they are incorporated into the dramatic discourse from Ellen Moers' article "The Angry Young Women":

> 1. Women are uncomfortable with facts or big ideas. Their intellectual preoccupations are small.
> 2. Women's experience is limited to home and hearth.
> 3. Women are naturally sensitive to smaller emotional states but usually have less perceptive powers than men.
> 4. Women's natures are passive, not active, and ordinarily they observe rather than do. Therefore, they are more adept at noting detailed social nuances than men; thus they are more conservative, nostalgic, and at times, brilliantly satiric of small social scenes.
> 6. Women are deficient in logic and order therefore lack the ability to create good plots. (qtd. in Olauson 3)

Such gender assumptions about women in criticism stem from the Aristotelian dramatic standard of plot construction as conflict, climax and resolution which as I have shown, is a style that has been represented as "logical" and seen as a necessary prerequisite to a good play. Therefore the good playwright must also appear as logical; since the feminine gender is constructed as emotional, then the text of the woman playwright and by association her subjects, becomes an obvious site for critical disregard on the basis of gender. Gender-biased criticism, however, works beyond the standards of drama by consistently locating the ability to achieve such constructions within the assumed logical qualities of the male playwright, thereby simultaneously constructing a critical language which represents positive qualities in a text using masculine gender attributes. Thus words like 'drive' and 'hard-hitting' are associated with males and therefore good playwrighting; a play about alcoholic families written by a man may be classified as 'gut-wrenching' while a similar subject represented by a woman is referred to as 'domestic' or 'trivial'. In Second Words, Margaret Atwood

discusses this masculine positivity in critical language, and the lack of positive critical terms for the differences represented through women's writing. After a survey of "sexual bias in reviewing" as a group project in 1971-72, they put together some classifications of gender-biased attitudes. The first one is called the "Quiller-Couch Syndrome" and refers to a turn-of-the-century essay by the man of that name who defined masculine and feminine styles in writing:

> The 'masculine' style is, of course, bold, forceful, clear, vigorous, etc.; the 'feminine' style is vague, weak, tremulous, pastel, etc. In the list of pairs you can include 'objective' and 'subjective', 'universal' or 'accurate depiction of society' versus 'confessional', 'personal', or even 'narcissistic' and 'neurotic'. It's roughly seventy years since Quiller-Couch's essay, but the 'masculine' group of adjectives is still much more likely to be applied to the work of male writers; female writers are much more likely to get hit with some version of 'the feminine style' or 'feminine sensibility', whether their work merits it or not. (197)

The second pattern they noticed is that "good equals male" and "bad equals female". Atwood refers to it as the Lady Painter Syndrome:

> 'When she's good', he said, 'we call her a painter; when she's bad, we call her a lady painter'. 'She writes like a man' is part of the same pattern; it's usually used by a male reviewer who is impressed by a female writer. It's meant as a compliment. See also 'she thinks like a man'. (197)

Maleness is exemplified by the 'good' male writer, but femaleness is seen by reviewers as a handicap which should be transcended. Further, adjectives for good male writing like "strong" or "gutsy" or "hard" are often used to describe pieces written by men which are then thought of "as merely realistic" (197). However, a similar piece by a woman is likely to be labelled as "cruel" or "tough" (197):

> The assumption is that women are by nature soft, weak and not very good, and that if a woman writer happens to be good, she should be deprived of her identity as a female and provided with higher (male) status. Thus the woman writer has, in the

> minds of such reviewers, two choices. She can be bad but female, a carrier of the 'feminine sensibility' virus; or she can be 'good' in male-adjective terms, but sexless. (198)

The important point is that there are no words in the critical vocabulary for expressing the concept of "good" female, good woman writer (198):

> Work by a male writer is often spoken of by critics admiring it as having 'balls'; ever hear anyone speak admiringly of work by a woman as having 'tits?' Possible Antidotes: Development of a 'good/female' vocabulary ('Wow, has that ever got Womb ... '); or preferably, the development of a vocabulary that can treat structures made of words as though they are exactly that, not biological entities possessed of sexual organs. (198)

Other critical methods for reducing the work of women writers is the concentration on domestic themes in the piece while ignoring other topics that might be represented; then patronising the writer for an excessive interest in domesticity (198). In this instance, if a man writes about doing the dishes it is considered realism but if a woman does "it's an unfortunate feminine genetic limitation" (199). Another syndrome noted is the "sexual compliment put down" where the reviewer comments on the "cute picture" of the "female author on the cover" while simultaneously dismissing her as a writer:

> She: 'How do you like my (design for an airplane/mathematical formula/medical miracle)?'
> He: 'You sure have a nice ass.' (199)

Finally, reviewers caught up in this syndrome often manifest the same logic when writing about women writers, stereotyping the author according to common media images, such as the "happy housewife" where writing is a hobby, or "Ophelia" which concentrates on how the writer is "a crazy freak" near to the brink of turning into a "suicidal Sylvia" (201). Atwood says that one interviewer actually asked her to "say something interesting ... say you write all your poems on drugs" (201). Another image is the "Miss Martyr or Movie Mag" which portrays the writer "as someone who suffers more than others. Why does the writer suffer more? Because she's

successful, and you all know Success Must Be Paid For" (201). Despite the one-dimensionality of traditional criticism represented by this male positivity in critical language, some women writers are anxious about being associated with feminism; one reason Atwood mentions is a reservation that feminist literary criticism would also become one-dimensional:

> However, a feminist criticism need not necessarily be one-dimensional. And--small comfort--no matter how narrow, purblind, and stupid such a criticism in its lowest manifestations may be, it cannot possibly be more narrow, purblind and stupid than some of the non-feminist critical attitudes and styles that have preceded it. (192)

Let us hope that feminist literary criticism will be up to the challenge of not repeating these "stupidities" of history.

Gender-biased positivity in critical language points to the necessity of further analysis with respect to the binary sign and signification itself; here the dominance of reason functions through representation to separate and privilege identity by difference over the "imaginary" identity by resemblance. This dichotomy has operated through continuing negative criticism that denigrates plays by women that utilise the imaginary, the poetic or illogical associations. Derrida's deconstruction of the binary sign combined with Foucault's analysis of the sign in The Order of Things where he argues that the "murmur of resemblance" resides in the associative powers of the imagination even when constructing identity by difference, provides a basis for altering this privileging of difference over resemblance. The binary sign of Saussure is defined as the link between concept and image, and represents a dichotomy between mental concept and physical image or word; but the opposition breaks down since the signified itself already consists of an endless chain of signifiers and thus is not a 'pure' mental concept. In The Order of Things Foucault considers the "archeology" of the binary sign in the seventeenth century as a conceptual shift in thought within the sign system from resemblance to

difference, and the consequences for knowledge and the dichotomy between imagination and reason:

> we shall find the signs that have become tools of analysis, marks of identity and difference, principles whereby things can be reduced to order, keys for a taxonomy; and, on the other, the empirical and murmuring resemblance of things, that unreacting similitude that lies beneath thought and furnishes the infinite raw material for divisions and distributions. On the one hand, the general theory of signs, divisions, and classifications; on the other, the problem of immediate resemblances, of the spontaneous movement of the imagination, of nature's repetitions. And between the two, the new forms of knowledge that occupy the area opened up by this new split. (58)

He argues that in the Renaissance there was a more complex notion of the sign:

> at that time, the theory of the sign implied three elements: that which was marked, that which did the marking, and that which made it possible to see in the first the mark of the second; and this last element was, of course, resemblance: the sign provided a mark exactly in so far as it was 'almost the same thing' as that which it designated. It is this unitary and triple system that disappears at the same time as 'thought by resemblance', and is replaced by a strictly binary organization. (64)

The sign was in the mark and thus was a "form of the world"; it was "bound to what it marks by the solid and secret bonds of resemblance or affinity" (58). Furthermore, "resemblance was linked to a system of signs; and it was the interpretation of those signs that opened up the field of concrete knowledge" (71). According to Foucault, "it was not knowledge that gave them their signifying function, but the very language of things" (59), and "it is in this sense that it was the divination of an essential implication" (59). In the seventeenth century the organisation of the sign becomes binary, constructed as a pure duality "in its simple state as an idea, or an image, or a perception, associated with or substituted for another" (64). But in this duality, the signifying element itself is not the sign and "in fact, the signifying element has no content, no function, and no

determination other than what it represents" (64):

> the binary theory of the sign, the theory upon which the whole general science of the sign has been founded since the seventeenth century, is linked according to a fundamental relation with a general theory of representation. (67)

The sign can be more or less probable, more or less distant from what it signifies, and either natural or arbitrary because:

> the relation of the sign to its content is not guaranteed by the order of things in themselves. The relation of the sign to the signified now resides in a space in which there is no longer any intermediary figure to connect them: what connects them is a bond established, inside knowledge, between the idea of one thing and the idea of another. (63)

Foucault is arguing that between the idea signified and the idea signifying, the idea of the role of representation is displaced and knowledge comes to "reside entirely within the signifying element" (emphasis mine; 64). Similarly the fabrication of meaning within representation is displaced and is seen to reside in the word:

> As in the sixteenth century, 'semiology' and 'hermeneutics' are superimposed--but in a different form. In the Classical age they no longer meet and join in the third element of resemblance; their connection lies in that power proper to representation of representing itself. There will therefore be no theory of signs separate and differing from an analysis of meaning. (66)

Therefore, from the 17th century on, "it is within knowledge itself that the sign is to perform its signifying function; it is from knowledge that it will borrow its certainty or its probability" (59):

> It is no longer the task of knowledge to dig out the ancient Word from the unknown places where it may be hidden; its job now is to fabricate a language, and to fabricate it well--so that, as an instrument of analysis and combination, it will really be the language of calculation ... it was the sign system that linked all knowledge to a language, and sought to replace all languages with a system of artificial symbols and operations of a logical nature. (62-63)

Foucault argues that the archeological conditions which made

possible the Classical system of thought, the binary system of signs, the introduction into knowledge of probability, analysis and combination, and the justified arbitrariness of the system, was "the dissociation of the sign and resemblance in the early seventeenth century" (63):

> So signs are now set free from that teeming world throughout which the Renaissance had distributed them. They are lodged henceforth within the confines of representation, in the interstices of ideas, in that narrow space in which they interact with themselves in a perpetual state of decomposition and recomposition. As for similitude, it is now a spent force, outside the realm of knowledge. It is merely empiricism in its most unrefined form; like Hobbes, one can no longer 'regard it as being a part of philosophy', unless it has first been erased in its inexact form of resemblance and transformed by knowledge into a relationship of equality or order. (emphasis mine; 67)

Despite the attempt to exclude resemblance in the production of knowledge, Foucault argues that "similitude is still an indispensable border of knowledge. For no equality or relation of order can be established between two things unless their resemblance has at least occasioned their comparison" (67). Imagination operates therefore as the "murmur of resemblance" even in the construction of identity by difference, as it was the imagination that used resemblance to link two things together:

> Without imagination, there would be no resemblance between things. The double requisite is patent. There must be, in the things represented, the insistent murmur of resemblance; there must be, in the representation, the perpetual possibility of imaginative recall. (69)

So resemblance was situated on the side of imagination, while the age of reason demanded identity by logic, and the categorisation of differences:

> From the seventeenth century, resemblance was pushed out to the boundaries of knowledge, towards the humblest and basest of its frontiers. There, it links up with imagination, with doubtful repetitions, with misty analogies. And instead of opening up the way to a science of interpretation, it implies a genesis that leads from those unrefined forms of the Same to the great tables of knowledge developed according to the forms of identity, of difference, and of order. (emphasis

mine; 71)

Here Foucault points out that the understanding of how knowledge is constructed through interpretation could have opened up a "science" that acknowledged its own interpretation and thus studied it as an object involved in the constant process of constructing ideology through representation. Instead the interpretive act of resemblance is banished to the outskirts of superstition and Knowledge is defined by identity established through difference and order. Thus the Aristotelian construction of knowledge as an interpretation of what was thought to be Divine essences, along with the Age of Reason project to construct order within the space of representation, have both assumed a fundamental metaphysics of binary opposites and the privileging of rationality: the first ignoring its own fact of interpretation through an "imitation of nature" and the other assuming representation as the constitution of meaning. These rationalistic projects have led to a historical distrust of imagination or that which is perceived as "unreason"--while those whose signs are constructed by "illogical" associations and resemblance are denigrated and marginalised as mad, superstitious or unskilled literary artisans.

Section (C). A Pub(l)ic/Private(s) Split, or Plays by Women: Subjects for Nonproduction

In this section I wish to address the "spiral of silence", where metaphysics in the lived world has excluded difference and rendered the plays of women as subjects for nonproduction; where erasure has resulted in the absence of her texts from the public realm and the private realm of imagination. I will discuss some of the effects of this absence that continue to perpetuate the reductionist and separatist notion of "women's" issues including: the lack of collective awareness in discourses of women writers and their representations; the subsequent dominance in the intertextual field of discourse as a form of direct and indirect power, including the containment and colonisation of the imagination; and the existence within the (hu)man discourse of what can ironically be called the discourse of femininity--also a discourse without dialogue, where definitions of the feminine gender have been arrived at through the appropriation of the sexual aspects of the female body, (which women are seen to collude with through reproductive work), rather than by agreement with the female mind and voice through textual interaction in the (hu)man discourse.

Metaphysical oppositions have affected women playwrights not only in the classroom but in the intertextual field of discourse where text and social practice interact to (re)produce each other in the lived social world, manifesting as the physical opposition of the public and private spheres. As I have shown in Part One (A) and (B), the masculinist identity of the (hu)man discourse privileges the public realm while Woman as an inferior opposite is consigned to the private sphere. Thus the female artist/theorist and her plays, by the very logic of this discourse, will predictably function as sites of contradiction and, as such, will be eliminated to preserve the identity of the (hu)man discourse, rendering her and the representations in her texts as subjects for nonproduction in the public realm. It is also predictable according to this metaphysics and logic that she will be represented as pertaining to the private, domestic

and emotional realm designated by her inferior gender definition regardless of her activities, thus explaining the representation of her work as "women's" plays and "women's" issues.

The project of tracing the effects of the historical erasure of women playwrights (and by implication, the hegemonic construction of the identity of the (hu)man discourse) are impossible to document fully as they are widely dispersed in an interrelated, intertextual community. To make matters more difficult, the effects of absence can not only be understood by what has been visible, but also by what is still unseen and unheard, and how such absences have resulted in exploitation for some people in the field of competing interests for social power. At issue here is not only the available literary responses in suppressed texts that may reflect contradictions or differences, but the possible alternatives that might occur in a society should such texts be allowed free circulation, for instance, public dialogue, different social structures and practices, or even more texts. In the intertextual field of discourse, the absence of texts which represent contradictory ideas to the dominant social norms contributes to the continuing spiral of silence and the continuing domination of particular worldviews. The silence and the dominance are in a sense self-perpetuating because of institutionalised literary and educational standards that reproduce the texts of some while excluding others, as I have shown in the evidence of anthological erasure of plays by women. The dominance of these traditional standards not only helps to construct, but also to maintain, social values like gender or class which are, in turn, reinforced by other interrelated institutions that people interact with in society. Since it is these dominant standards themselves which are reflected in the critical practices that have ignored women's playscripts, understanding them metaphorically as the 'bricks' of beliefs, values and ideologies then makes them available as important keys to deconstructing the power paradigm of institutional

structures which have deployed them to exclude certain texts, beliefs, and alternative social practices. The dominant standards not only ignore and erase different texts that do appear, but silence those that may have appeared, rubbing out the imaginative possibilities by the demand that they be correct within social standards of acceptability.

The dominant masculinist identity of the literary canon is maintained as the status quo within the educational institution by the force of tradition--the acceptable literary texts that are treated as the historical standards of objective definitions for good literature. Although the standards seem to exclude from the curriculum any writing that is not good enough, either in content or form, 'not good enough' is inherently a value judgement made by some people on the style of someone else's creativity and as such can operate to exclude contradiction or difference as it is perceived in relation to the tradition. Therefore, texts by women, working class people, blacks, or migrants which represent styles or perspectives which are merely different, instead are treated as inferior or ignored because they are not the same as traditional writing by men. Even though the tradition of literary men seems flexible as it records the evolution of different writing styles and ideas within itself, some of these texts which appear to be radical on one level may still be reinforcing traditional gender or race relations for example. Tradition as practiced cannot really be that flexible as the standards themselves impose limitations on radical creativity or difference for any writer; there are men whose writings challenged the most contradictory aspects of power relations and they have also had their work suppressed. But if it were possible for institutional standards to represent an objective criteria for all writing, there would be some ability to include what seems to be new or different writing as it presents itself from anywhere, without resistance from the institutions which purport to deal in the business of circulating texts, and without hostile reactions from critics to some perceived

threat in the writing of a play. Since the writing of women has been excluded from educational curricula for so long, despite proof of success both in the critical and public domain, it is obvious that the resistance to accepting these and other texts as 'good' writing constitutes rigidity in the identity of the (hu)man discourse itself through the institutionalisation of the definitions themselves. This is precisely because the traditional standards are not objective but are very much based on subjective perspectives that depend upon the belief system of the inferiority of women, and associated socioeconomic values that operate through institutions whose power for continuation depends upon rendering invisible anything different to themselves.

This invisibility of different perspectives and values precipitates a lack of dialogue in the whole textual field, in the public and private realm, between that which verifies the structural assumptions, and that which contradicts them. Though we can note that there is an absence of texts and a lack of discourse about women, minorities or socially disadvantaged groups in the Canon, this 'absence' is also manifested in the public realm through libraries, schools, bookstores, and public media discourses. This absence invades the private realm as it is about people who write for themselves and others, making representations which involve collective and personal pain, powerlessness and political isolation, and it is about people who are not allowed to read these words. Here absence leads to the colonisation and containment of the human imagination where metaphysical dominance in the intertextual field of discourse crosses over into the physical public and private domains. The institutional erasure of difference thus ensures that the public domain is overflowing with homogeneous representations which render "objective" the dominance of patriarchal and economic ideologies; render "normal" the social practices that rigorously separate the public and domestic realms; and render "natural" the gender and class roles that predominantly appropriate the mental realm of work in the

public sphere of business, politics and art for middle/upper class white heterosexual males, while women, the working class, and so-called minorities are considered biologically appropriate for domestic and manual labor; homosexuals, still considered unnatural, are best hidden. Even though individual people do not react uniformly to the signs and texts of a discourse, nor do they always fully accept or participate in a dominant ideological practice; nevertheless, without visible signs of other people's resistance to identify with in the public realm of texts and discourse, they do not have the opportunity to link their own personal problems and resistance to an external collective perception of an ideological inequality. It is perhaps here that we think of the "spiral of silence", of people isolated and fearful to express opinions which seem to be solitary and different.

This silence means that it is difficult to generalise about the effects of erasure upon individuals in the social field, as it is equally difficult to locate the sites of resistance only in the recuperated texts of those who have been erased or marginalised. What can be more confidently documented and analysed are the traces of structures and absences as larger effects; for example, that certain continued critical practices at the institutional levels have resulted in certain obvious difficulties for contemporary women writers and their audiences. These include problems with achieving production, publication, and continued distribution. Olauson argues that the relationship between critical practices within institutions and textual availability in the public realm cannot be ignored. This relationship has been avoided in the past by a dominant ideology that separates the public and private sphere as if they do not influence each other. This ideology assumes that critics are unbiased, objective and adhere to some absolute standard of good writing; and argues a free enterprise platform whereby if a text is 'good' then public demand will ensure its availability. All these assumptions ignore the

power of critical practices as taught to and practiced by critics and academics within institutions to construct the existence of a text, or determine whether it is even worthy to be read. Olauson writes:

> Megan Terry points out that perhaps because of critical disregard her reading public has had a difficult time finding her plays in bookstores and libraries. In her opinion there is an attitude of indifference toward women authors, even toward those whose works have been published. (8)

I have argued that the foundations of such problems for contemporary women playwrights were laid in deeply-rooted, historical notions of 'great drama' standards which are actually derived from metaphysical and philosophical structures that contribute to gender biased criticism and representation. Anthological or textual erasure continues to have several important traceable effects with respect to contemporary women playwrights and production: 1) a lack of women's texts not only in institutional curricula and historical literary discourse but in the public sphere; 2) an absence of women with authoritative positions in theatre careers that regulate the plays available for the public; 3) a lack of collective awareness among women regarding previous texts by women playwrights resulting in a lack of textual participation in discourse formation; 4) the development of a 'new' genre--feminist theatre--associated with feminism as a social movement and feminist literary criticism; 5) the tokenisation of a few women's texts in anthologies of the mainstream canon with most dismissed as 'women's plays' to be dealt with by feminist literary criticism and an alternative feminist canon, itself treated as a subspecies of human discourse. I will discuss some of these effects of absence in this section and go on to address the others in Parts Three and Four.

<u>Plays by Women in the (Hu)man Discourse: Sites of Contradiction and Subjects for Nonproduction</u>

While a poststructuralist feminist critique of the masculinist identity of the (hu)man discourse, deconstructing its metaphysics, philosophical structures, and oppositional

logic, leads to the conclusion that women as subjects will be excluded from this discourse because of their gender identity as inferior opposites; another aspect to these metaphysics is the treatment of the subjects of women's texts within the (hu)man discourse. By association with women's gender, we have seen reviews that constantly emphasise the domestic aspects of women's texts. However, there is a serious lack of discussion and therefore dialogue with many of the other "public" themes or social "subjects" represented in the plays of women, as critics often ignore mentioning them in the reviews. At this point in the thesis it can be suggested that the erasure of women playwrights signifies an exclusion of contradiction therefore in two ways, firstly because of their (op)positional gender and secondly because their textual subjects--representing problems and differences--demand an end to dominance. Women authors in the (hu)man discourse are a contradiction to their gender role which we see in author based criticism, and even without reading the erased plays we can speculate that these texts represent differences and contradictions to traditional social structures and dominant notions of gender. Reading the plays gives further evidence of such representations to support this "logical" speculation, and of course the evidence from the reviews also tells us that certain subjects are ignored and excluded from serious dialogue by the critics of women playwrights. Thus erasure has resulted in the nonproduction of women playwrights and their subjects in the (hu)man dramatic discourse which not only excludes contradiction, but refuses to dialogue with difference that demands an end to dominance.

The examination of the metaphysics of literary standards in the intertextual field of discourse, as they participate in the spiral of silence and the colonisation of the imagination, is also the investigation of metaphysics in the lived social world through the practices of daily life that form the subjects of plays by women which then become erased. Because there may be few texts to represent the social

problems or differences of the "voiceless", and these texts are also not a "reflection" but a fictionalised construction, the social practices of daily life themselves can be read as textual constructs. For example, the definitions of femininity and the work of the feminine gender role, can be considered for their participation in constructing the ideologies represented by the dominant social paradigm--who reproduces, educates, regulates the marketplace, legislates, who negotiates what gets counted in the system of National Accounts. Ryan refers to this as "the metaphysics of everyday life" in Marxism and Deconstruction (117):

> Metaphysical assumptions become ideologically effective when they are institutionalized or woven into the habitus of a society. For example, metaphysical categorical distinctions between private and public, interior and exterior, would be used to justify the division of labor between women in the household and men in the public domain. (118)

The philosophical metaphysical definitions prescribed within assumptions of literary standards are not, as Ryan says, "simply a question of knowledge confined to the philosophy classroom. Metaphysics is in the world, as ideology, in those unconscious presuppositions and categorical foundations of social practice" (118). Further, Ryan explains that metaphysical thinking provides the modes of categorisation which "define and legitimate the form of division" and that ideology "always legitimates a division of labor," a practice which "necessarily" produces tension and contradiction in the field "because it relies on an unequally distributed differential of power and force" (118). For example, in semiotics the primary signification of the signs male and female is the physical sex difference, but the secondary signification of these signs incorporates the social construction of gender which defines female as representing femininity and male as representing masculinity, with further significations being that feminine is naturally inferior, and lacking all the masculine qualities defined as positive. The differential of power arising from the division of labor is revealed in the contradictions of gender representation. For

example, nurturing and caretaking are secondary gender significations attributed to women as an extrapolation of female reproduction, and thus are not regarded as positive masculine gender qualities. Logically therefore, they are inferior qualities which must be represented as positive for the feminine gender through the glorification of motherhood, though in actuality they remain devalued as either low-paid or unpaid labor in both the public realm of business and the private domestic realm. It is the either/or metaphysical perception of such identity constructions, which relies either on assumptions of total difference or on equally erroneous assumptions of androgyny as total sameness, that represent such a simplistic separation of the heterogeneous dynamics of any organism, either in the individual or the community.

Ryan argues that such divisive forms are necessary for ideology and its function of "legitimating dominance and guaranteeing hegemony because metaphysical thinking homogenizes contradiction, dissonance, and heterogeneity" (118). The attempt to produce the state of a false homogeneous reality requires the "forceful exclusion of certain messages from the public domain" (118), and these often have to do with differences and lived social problems with dominant social structures and gender definitions relating to pain, privation, hunger and even death (here I think of Alma deGroen's The Joss Adams Show where a devalued young mother throws her child down a garbage shaft). It is precisely those contradictions--expressed through social and textual expressions of deviance and rage--that reflect the tension and pain produced by unequal power practices within an ideology such as patriarchy; and, as such, would need to be marginalised or suppressed. The historical erasure of the majority of published texts by women playwrights, that critique the problematic social definitions as textual constructs, is thus a form of ideological dominance in the intertextual field of discourse where critics and the dramatic discourse have not taken the social issues

represented by women playwrights seriously.

A striking feature of many plays by women over a substantial period of time is the representation of marginalised subjects that function as sites of contradiction because they depict unfavourable consequences of traditional gender identities and associated economic and political ideologies in a patriarchal, or male dominant system. Thus a play textually depicting domestic violence--child abuse and wife-battering--contradicts the 'normal' social identity of the home as a haven; a horrifying rape scene jars the myth of female pleasure in being dominated; women in factories keeping and feeding babies in toilets disrupts the assumption of civilised, satisfied workers. Female characters as mothers/housewives who go mad, die, or destroy their children offer a different definition of the angel in the house or the happy secure housewife. Repeated representations of the so-called 'normal' gender roles until they seem natural and inevitable--where romance and its epilogue, motherhood, is central to a woman's identity while a man's identity is built on his position in the world--continuously reinforce the notion that experiencing contradictions or a different reality is an individual's innate problem rather than an interrelated consequence of social structures. This is where erasure operates to prevent collective awareness of contradictions as a widespread and socially constructed problem; through the nonproduction of subjects that contradict the dominant identity structures, thus rendering them seemingly marginal problems, limited to a few.

In addition, the fact that women writers are representing these contradictions reveals a different perspective of women other than as 'unequal', ignorant, or totally dominated. Their analysis of gender and other social structures through textual representations of strategies for coping or resisting a masculinist context, reveals not only an awareness of male-dominated constructions of power in both the domestic and public spheres, but also theorises how those domains overlap, and interrelate with economics and race,

such that the plays move beyond the restricted classification of women's issues. Barbara Christian writes in "The Race for Theory" that, despite her reluctance to "pronounce" a "black feminist theory":

> This is not to say we are not theorizing. Certainly our literature is an indication of the ways in which our theorizing, of necessity, is based on our multiplicity of experiences. (Feminist Studies 76)

Such textual strategies may range from representations of historical images of activist women, 'history' and 'myth' from a different perspective, to reconstructing rituals that celebrate women and life-affirming cycles, to depicting women who try and fail to make it in a 'man's world', to women who cope with social roles through collaboration with other women, to women who resist through deviation in madness, crime, and illness, or women who survive in a dystopian future.

In my readings there are no representations of a utopian vision where women and men co-exist with equal power in the same social structures that have existed historically. Some feminist critics, wanting positive role model images of women, have asked where these representations are? Writing about feminist plays, Moore considers this lack in "Woman Alone, Women Together" from Women in American Theatre:

> Most of these plays derive at least some of their dramatic impact from the fact that they look at pre-women's movement times from a post-women's movement point of view: this is the way it was, it has not been clearly seen before. There is not yet a body of playwrighting work that deals with the new communal future or that concerns women characters with feminist values and aspirations, if you will, the Mount Everests that women have begun in the last ten years to climb. What are the dramas in a woman's life when her life is a life she has freely chosen? (189)

It seems to me that whole point of a structural critique of representation is to consider the way we as subjects do not freely choose. Such a lack therefore may not only signify the traditional realist's problems with what a heroine can do, nor simply point to the colonisation of the female and

male imagination, but rather may signal the impossibility of the representation of equality within hierarchical social structures that produce unequal gender, economic and political power differentials. The problematic relationships of women within patriarchal models of dominance, then, are not represented in plays by women as 'natural' nor as blindly accepted, but as an intense struggle for survival in a continuing process of negotiation. To position women playwrights and their representations of women as unequal, second-class citizens or "deficient carbon copies of men" reflects a position that Oakley refers to in Subject Woman, where the "inequalities are paralleled by unequal interpretations" (333).

Power as Dominance and the Colonisation of the Imagination

In this section I wish to discuss the dominant model of power in the (hu)man discourse in terms of direct and indirect social power, where the ability to control representation through literary standards and through erasure as a tool of dominance is an important instrument in the maintenance of particular worldviews, through the containment and colonisation of human imagination and therefore the (re)production of dominant belief systems. In the identity of the (hu)man discourse, the historical model for a 'power over' paradigm is a hierarchical structure where power is defined as either "control over others" or the individual's "ability to do", but this definition excludes the possibility of the group's "ability to do" without exerting control over others, i.e. shared power as in co-operatives. I would argue that alternative structures of power, i.e. nonhierarchical, are not widely discussed in the public domain because they contradict the dominant definition of power, and in Part Four I will suggest that many women playwrights theorise alternative structures of power based on association rather than dominance.

The hierarchical model of power operates through several interrelated aspects: 1) as an ideology based on the assumption of male superiority; 2) as a hierarchy of

authority figures within the institutions of heterosexuality, marriage and the family; 3) as the construction of male and female identities subjected to power as dominance, repression of self-determination or autonomy, and coercion into gender oppositions where difference is based on exaggerated polarities that repress resemblance; and 4) as an ideology that permeates sexual, moral, economic, and political definitions which maintain male dominance through authoritative institutional support systems. In Bryan Turner's The Body and Society he points out that, as the institutional support for patriarchy is diminished under the onslaught of "a powerful ideological critique" which argues for women's legal rights concerning property and economic distribution, we are left with what he calls patrism: dominance based only on prejudice and discrimination (156). He argues that institutional power patterns are also fought out at a personal face-to-face level in a micro-politics of the body, disease, deviance, and violence. Despite some legislative or institutional changes regarding women's rights, patrism suggests that the construction of power as dominance over others is still manifested at the personal level through familial hierarchies and social gender patterns which continue to pass on the seeds of perceptual inequality in a doctrine of seeing some men as greater than others, women as somehow lesser than men, and adults as better than children. Feminist theory has been engaged in extensive critiques which seek to understand the effects of power patterns on people as applied through social constructions of gender, race and class. These critiques are not restricted to women's liberation but question the 'naturalness' of gender, the structural definitions of 'masculinity' or 'government', and the 'power over' social hierarchies of the state that oppress and victimise both women and men. Social structures that disempower and prevent the self-autonomy of people provide the fertile ground for various levels of fascism, and are handed down over generations through colonisation of the imagination, control of creativity,

restriction of life-choice options, and the regulation of time, space and property. However, the notion that power is only external and able to be totally centralised is being questioned, as are the assumptions that the oppressor is a victor, that women are passive victims, or that all men benefit from patriarchy, which I will discuss further in Part Four, "Patterns of Power: the (De)colonisation of the Imagination".

R.A. Sydie discusses Weber's work on patriarchy and power in her book Natural Women, Cultured Men, with Weber's definition of power as the "probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests" (56); he also refers to domination as a special form of power in two general types:

> the indirect type refers to the power that a monopoly over economic resources can convey, and the direct type ... control over others. This latter form of domination is one that expresses an 'authoritarian power of command' that will be obeyed. (qtd. in Sydie 56)

Sydie points out that the force of tradition sanctifies the "authoritarian" power of the patriarch such that when direct power is exercised in relationships between people in families, he is "dependent upon the subordinates' willingness to obey in the absence of any means of enforcement" (57). Indirect power, however, exercised in hierarchical structures that monopolise economic resources, legislation, and enforcement agencies, acts to institutionalise dependency through centralised state control over the social collective, using resource deprivation as well as enforcement by the threat of violence. It is obvious that both forms of domination interrelate with each other, in the public and domestic realms, to produce social structures where power is exerted as control over others, resulting in dependency and victimhood in the domination-oppression hierarchy. In this sense indirect public power affects the domestic interactions of direct power through the erosion of freedom and stress from restrictive conditions of lack such as poverty, illness

or exhaustion. The domestic sphere mirrors the structure of indirect power, disguised within the family hierarchy where authoritarian child-raising practices and coercive conditional love prepare the child to accept forms of indirect social domination as an adult. In Part Four, Section (A), I will discuss theories of Reich and others, who have long argued for less oppressive family practices, such that children will resist social dominance. Thus both forms of domination interact to set up conditions for personal disempowerment while institutionalising dependency on the collective level, using representation as the science of ideology to 'naturalise' and 'normalise' the unequal power constructs.

Heath recalls a course where a graduate student remarked that he could not conceive of anyone other than as 'a full human subject--what else could one be?' to which the female teacher answered simply, 'well you can be a victim'" (Men 25). As Rowbotham writes in Once a Feminist in 1969:

> Partly the matter is very concrete. it is about 25p an hour and the suicide rate, about nursery schools and legal discrimination. All these need to be studied. But there is another important aspect to 'the women problem'--how it feels in the head. If the external social situation subdues us, it is our consciousness that contains us. (12)

Rather than categorise people as either a full human subject or a victim, it is less reductionist to say that people are in a sense always full human subjects, but may be operating through generations of ideology or 'reality' constructs whereby they accept victimising roles as 'their lot'; roles which restrict self-empowerment to the point of near hopelessness for organised collective resistance. To the extent that people are not aware of how they lose (or give up) their power to act like full, empowered human subjects--self-determining but also with the awareness of their collective relationship--such is the degree to which they have been victimised by external social forces. For example, since men have been socially conditioned not to focus on feelings, while women are taught to satisfy everyone else's

needs first, these binary identities reinforced by institutionalised normalcy make it difficult for either one to realise that they are operating under restrictive definitions (normalcy operating here as the 'thick boot' that disguises the fact that someone is stepping on your foot). As Sawchuk argues, dominant representations of ideological constructs which produce a physical state of 'normalcy' such as gender role inequities or working class poverty masks a different kind of colonisation as well:

> It is the imaginary which informs what is to be our experience of both past and future. Hence, the colonization that capitalism achieves is also an imperialism of the imagination--not just domination over such physical spaces as the third world. (64)

The colonisation of the imagination which sets up the lack of people's ability to even imagine self-empowerment and collective strength, is referred to by Rowbotham as "containment". She writes:

> The oppressed in their state before politics lack both the idea and practice to act upon the external world. Both coherent protest and organised resistance are inconceivable. They do not presume to alter things, they are timid. Life is cyclical, weary, events happen, disaster impinges, there is no rational order in the universe, to the authorities properly belong the business and responsibilities of government. They play dumb and the superior people assume they have nothing to say, nothing to complain of. Those in power conclude their 'inferiors' must be a different order of people. This justifies their subjugation. The impresion is confirmed by their inability to take the advantage offered to them, by the shrugging off of responsibilities, by the failure to take initiatives. They refuse to help themselves, they are their own worst enemy. But meanwhile they survive. They are skilled in collaboration and subterfuge. They do not compete, they resort to sly, indirect methods. Like Brer Rabbit they lie low. <u>Women have been lying low for so long that most of us cannot imagine how to get up</u>. We have apparently acquiesced always in the imperial game and are so perfectly colonised that we are unable to consult ourselves. Because the assumption does not occur to us, it does not occur to anyone else either. We are afraid to mention ourselves in case it might disturb or divert some important matter he has in hand. We are the

> assistants, the receivers, the collaborators, dumb, lacking in presumption, not acting consciously upon the external world, much given to masochism. We become sly--never trust a woman--we seek revenge, slighted we are terrible; we are trained for subterfuge, we are natural creatures of the underground. Within us there are great gullies of bitterness, but they do not appear on the surface. Our wrapped-up consciousness creeps along the sewers, occasionally emerging through a manhole. After death, hag-like spirits roam the earth, the symbols of frustrated unfulfilled desires. But in life our spirits are contained. (emphasis mine; Once 2-13)

Consensus reality is not a simple observation of the 'way it really is out there' but is basically imposed through the dominance of certain ideologies among competing versions of social constructs. Therefore, the institutional powers to exclude, repress and erase some versions as unreal, bad, impossible or incorrect before they are fully circulated in the textual/social field for collective discussion and response is an extremely powerful political advantage that reduces the imagined possibilities from the textual field. Thus women's writings which critique or offer different imaginings of 'reality' have contributed less to the formation of consensus reality constructs because of their long term lack of exposure in the textual field; a colonisation of containment, but also confusion, emptiness and a sense of 'unreality'.

In Christiane Rochèfort's article "Are Women Writers Still Monsters?" she describes how she survived as a female creator, with a feeling of unreality that accompanied growing up female in a society with gendered sexes:

> I know with certainty that my salvation as a creator (I mean as a person) is due to the fact that I was dumb enough, blind and deaf enough, not to understand that I was a female. Although it was obvious, and I received all the necessary information about it (don't do this, don't say that, don't, don't, a little girl does not), I remained deaf, blind, and reluctant: not me, not for me. 'Me' was something else. Somewhere else. Since reality was a lie, I had a reality of my own: a secret life in dreams. There, a double of mine with no defined sex (I didn't know that I meant: with no defined role) would do such great

> things as riding horses, sailing boats, rescuing animals from hunters and people from fire, plague, Indians from white people, inventing stories, drawing, dancing, making music, sculpting stones ... In the world of appearances, I didn't feel real. (emphasis added; New French Feminisms 184)

Rochèfort says she survived because her parents couldn't afford a therapist who would bring her back to 'reality', but writes that hers must be a common experience which defeats many girls:

> I learned later on, in consciousness-raising groups, that it is a pretty common experience--female children are driven mad, schizophrenic--because there is a total antagonism between what they are and what society wants them to be. Among them, a remarkable proportion is defeated in this combat. I almost was, between twelve and twenty: then I was rescued by a small light of political consciousness: I learned that I was an oppressed person.... (184-185)

Since both sexes are gendered into roles, the repression and conflict must exist for men as well, though it may express itself differently. While boys are given wider scope in terms of how they can imagine themselves publicly in the world, they nevertheless suffer from a colonisation that reduces their expression within the confines of social 'normalcy'.

The Construction of Femininity: A Discourse without Dialogue

The definition of femininity within the (hu)man discourse--where women's texts are excluded--can be ironically called a discourse of femininity. The construction of femininity includes the active participation of women to create themselves within the (hu)man discourse, but in a specific and limited way--through appropriation of their biology and their work--but not by agreement through dialogue in the intertextual field, nor in the institutional decision-making that organises social practices. In this section I would like to discuss how the absence of women's texts, their representations of difference, sameness and contradictions, have led to definitions of femininity (and masculinity) that need to be questioned because they have been formed in discourse without dialogue and agreement, yet

simultaneously they have been constructed through the intertextual field of discourse with the participation of women and their work in society. The erasure of women's texts and dialogue from the (hu)man discourse suggests that there is dominance in the representation of femininity, where women have been subjected to an ideology within the (hu)man discourse that men write, men govern, and men define what is good drama.

A direct and perhaps obvious result of plays by women as subjects for nonproduction is the historical lack of awareness regarding previous or even contemporary women playwrights among the general population of women. While women have been writing plays at least since the 10th century (in the Anglo-Saxon sphere), critical disregard and curricular absence in educational institutions has prevented any ongoing discussion of their work which can take its place as part of the historical drama discourse. The result is a history of drama as written by men, with critical practices of interpretation developed by men. Yet this patriarchal discourse does not fully succeed in excluding the existence of women and their texts since, in actual fact, the discourse becomes <u>defined by its need not to include them</u>. Such a discourse which seems merely to be transferring meanings freely is actually operating to constitute meanings within its structure through its own self-legitimising measures; and these are embedded in a political relationship between texts and social practices. Within this relationship where women do participate in certain social practices but are largely excluded from textual production and institutional decision-making, the discourse of femininity has been constructed simultaneously with the (hu)man discourse, such that femininity becomes defined as the legitimate exclusion from social practices that organise power. According to Bell and Newby in their article, "Husbands and Wives" from <u>Dependence and Exploitation in Work and Marriage</u>:

> A degree of ideological hegemony over women must clearly be maintained if they are to continue to accept their subordinate position as natural and

> desirable, and the superior power of men as legitimate. (159)

In order for women as readers to accept the invisibility of women writers as natural, an ideological hegemony must exist regarding not only the superiority of males as writers, but about the 'naturalness' of a lack of women's writing. Bell and Newby discuss the process of legitimising husband dominance, but it also applies to literary practices if we replace the word "wives" with "women readers' and "husbands" with "male writers":

> It is apparent that, in this case, wives [women readers] must be provided with a consistent and coherent set of ideas which interpret the dominance of their husbands [male writers] in a manner that reinforces their legitimacy. Evaluative and factual statements must be made to elide--not only do men hold power but they ought to do so. Male interpretations must be taken to be correct interpretations, particularly in the area of defining rights and obligations. (emphasis mine; 159)

Though Aristotelian standards of great drama are responsible for the literary qualities that are privileged in the dramatic literary canon, it is the institutions--managed by men in top positions--which have conferred legitimate greatness upon male writers, through textual reproduction and canonical formation. While masculine interpretations of literary standards are one part of this discourse, what also must be taken as legitimate are male definitions that women ought not to write. Bell and Newby argue that achieving this kind of legitimacy within an ideological hegemony is done by "a degree of totality in the hierarchical situation" (159), and that sex-role socialisation:

> both within the family and later in agents of secondary socialisation, such as schools--is a vital element in the achievement of ideological hegemony over women ... That male and female children are in many important respects treated differently from birth by all their significant others, in a manner that is consistent with the existing ideological hegemony, is a, if not the, vital social mechanism for the creation and maintenance of this ideological control. (emphasis mine; 160)

Writing, when socially constructed as legitimate professional work for men, does not appear to be something that anyone can do successfully, in some sort of space which is free but, instead, is largely perceived as an area of work already appropriated by masculinity. Therefore, by implication, the social construction of femininity becomes vital to the ideological hegemony as part of and not separate from the discourse that legitimises a literary canon where texts naturally ought to be written by men.

Thus for Dorothy E. Smith, in Becoming Feminine: The Politics of Popular Culture, femininity is a textually mediated discourse "not limited to the text, though it is organised by and in relation to the text" (40). To explore femininity as discourse "means a shift away from viewing it as a normative order, reproduced through socialization, to which women are somehow subordinated. Rather, femininity is addressed as a complex of actual relations vested in texts" (emphasis mine; 41). Smith defines texts as:

> the more or less permanent and above all replicable forms of meaning, of writing, painting, television, film, etc. The production, distribution, and uses of texts are a pervasive and highly significant dimension of contemporary social organization (38)

And she refers to Foucault's concept of discourse in The Archaelogy of Knowledge as:

> an assemblage of 'statements' arising in an ongoing 'conversation', mediated by texts, among speakers and hearers separated from one another in time and space. The notion of discourse displaces the analysis from the text as originating in writer or thinker, to the discourse itself as an ongoing intertextual process. (39)

However, she argues that "texts must not be isolated from the practices in which they are embedded and which they organize" (38). Discourse is not limited to the literary or visual text in some separate physical space, but includes the intersection of texts with the social practices they organise and are embedded in; these social practices then participate in transforming and reproducing further texts such that the social practices themselves can also be read as texts:

> Texts enter into and order courses of action and relations among individuals. The texts themselves have a material presence and are produced in an economic and social process which are part of a political economy. (40)

In discussing femininity as a discourse, Smith wants to see it as a social organisation of relations which is mediated by texts, but she also does not want to lose women as active subjects, nor ignore the possibilities for resistance within discourse. She says:

> In the context of Foucault's archeology, the concept of discourse has some of the same force as structuralism in reducing the subject to a mere bearer of systematic processes external to her ... We must not begin by conceiving women as manipulated by mass media or subject passively to male power, but recognize when we speak of 'femininity' that we are talking about <u>how women's skills and work enter actively into textually-mediated relations which they do not organize or produce</u>. (emphasis mine; 39)

Though women's historical work and skills have participated in forming a discourse of femininity within the structure of male-dominance represented as patriarchal discourse, their texts and responses to real life situations in oppressive social structures have not been allowed entry to the formal/institutional areas of discourse formation. Thus women have been appropriated for a discourse of femininity within the ideology of patriarchy, and to varying degrees participate in and must live the consequences, <u>but they have not been allowed to produce the social organisations nor institutions which reproduce the discourse</u>. There is then an element of collusion by women but it is by way of participation in daily life, while simultaneously women are denied the participation in decision-making power structures which would allow them to insert their responses to problems and consequent desires for change. Smith, then, does not want to view 'femininity' as:

> an effect of patriarchal oppression. Apart from avoiding the treatment of women as passive victims, it is important, I believe, to recognize women's active and creative part in its social organization. (39)

These "actual relations vested in texts" have to do with what people actually do; since femininity, as it has been constructed, is part of a complex of actual practices, it cannot adequately be comprehended by reducing it to the "level of meaning, normative pattern or signification" (38):

> The concept of culture has been important recently in restoring our sense of the active engagement of people in the making of their social worlds, and has been a valuable corrective to the banalities of the causal models ... which transform what people do into the effects of processes at work behind their backs. It has the disadvantage, however, of transposing what people actually do into phenomena of meaning or signification. Analysis then focuses on the system of significations or symbols. The actual process as an ongoing, evolving, unfolding social organization of the actual practices of actual individuals escapes. (38)

In a "Tale of Inscription/Fashion Statements" Kim Sawchuk cautions that assessing what people do to interpret cultural meaning is extremely problematic because, firstly, it assumes that all people receive and respond to images and texts within discourse in a unified way:

> It is assumed that images are literally absorbed by the viewer, that each image is immediately readable and meaningful in and of itself, regardless of the context, the circumstances of its production, circulation and reception. The viewer, except of course for the educated critic who has learned to see beyond this level of deception, is assumed to be immediately susceptible to these images. (Canadian Journal, vol XI, 1987, p 55)

Secondly, she argues that there is no inherent meaning that can be interpreted from the intersection of one or two variables such as sex and class, which are then extrapolated from cultural practices:

> The 'meaning' of cultural phenomena is neither expressive of one or two primary social relations, nor is it 'symbolic'. One cannot assume that a crucifix worn by Madonna is an expression of her essentially Christian nature, or that the wearing of high heels reflects a woman's identification with a patriarchal-sexual economy. (57)

Sawchuk discusses fashion, and femininity, as "constituted through the effects of language, through the circulation and

vagaries of discourses which affect the very nature of its images and its objects" (55). All the uncertainty of language and interpretation thus applies to the construction of femininity, refuting the notion of some 'natural' fashion for women which reflects their inherently natural femininity. Referring to the intertextual constitution of subjectivity and objects, she argues that it challenges interpretation of the object as a "simple sign, symbol or icon" (56):

> Neither fashion nor woman can be seen as objects determined simply by two variables, such as sex and class, for they are constructed in this fabric of intertextual relations. At any specific historical juncture, fashion is located in a discourse on health (corsets, suntanning, fitness), beauty (ideal shapes of breasts, buttocks or lips), morality and sexuality (dress as sign of one's moral fibre), the nation and the economy (the question of the veil in Algeria), and location (climate, geography, seasonal variations), to name only a few possibilities. These discourses involve the body, produce the body as a textured object with multi-dimensional layers, touched by the rich weave of history and culture. (55)

Textually mediated discourse "displaces the central place given to the textual by Foucault, bringing into view the social relations in which texts are embedded and which they organize" (Smith 40). The concept of discourse used in this way "transposes the kinds of observations collected by the concept of 'culture' into actual practices which are open to direct investigations" (emphasis mine; 40-41).

The reduced accessibility of women's texts that have investigated social practices and represent contradictions arising from problematic social structures, obviously suggests that both male and female readers have been more exposed to the meanings of established gender codes in texts and social practices from the traditional (hu)man discourse, which has been passed off generically as the "human". However, because the intertextuality of discourse intersects with people's everyday lives, the ideological hegemony which Bell and Newby argue is necessary cannot be maintained indefinitely because, for example, the often violent

contradictions in women's real lives impinge upon the patriarchal discourse that represents itself as protection, safety, or romance. The crisis for patriarchy as an ideology, or as Turner names it, patrism, is precisely related to the crisis of representation which, as Foucault noted in The Order of Things, cannot represent life:

> The obscure but stubborn spirit of a people who talk, the violence and the endless effort of life, the hidden energy of needs, were all to escape from the mode of being of representation. (209)

The power of withholding women's texts to inhibit women's collective awareness and action is great, for the dominant social construction of gender identity lays the basis for women's low feelings of self-worth within themselves. Without an external common site of resistance, they continue to perceive their inferior social status as purely their own problem, if they recognise it at all. As personal contradictions intensify and become more widely recognised as related to larger social structures, these contradictions often lay the groundwork for the emergency that presents itself as a crisis of faith in the authority of social institutions which do not deal effectively or compassionately with the reality of people's lives. The awareness of the 'emergency' though is considerably slowed by the lack of inclusion of women's texts in the educational curricula, and thus has important political as well as literary implications. Without the visible participation by women in the decision-making process of the construction of social practices, we are left with a patriarchal tradition that only appropriates women for a passive, voiceless discourse of femininity--resulting in masculinist institutions which are nearly empty of women's texts, bereft of adequate personal representation and concerted political action by women, resulting in a public social arena where men are also excluded from engaging with women and their texts on a larger scale. In the intersection of contradictions between the representations of a patriarchal ideology, and the actual social practices of the definitions of femininity, lies the

crisis of oppressive conditions that prefigures the existence of feminism as a social movement and in language. Thus the absence of women's texts has contributed in part to the emergence of feminism that is directly concerned with the contradictions and oppression in women's lives. With feminism came the interaction of feminists with the patriarchal discourse, developing into feminist literary criticism, as well as the formation of a 'new' genre of drama known as feminist theatre which I will discuss in Part Three.

Summary: "Women's Issues" and the Metaphysics of Marginalisation

In Alma De Groen's Rivers of China which portrays a futuristic society that has reversed gender power and eliminated all writing by men, a female doctor tells an oppressed male orderly, "you can give anybody a history that never happened and they'll believe it" (54). But the actual existence of social analysis in published texts by women writers along with the evidence of their literary and popular success, could not be erased completely from the memory of generations. The leakage of their traces, and the continuing painful contradictions in women's lives, combined with misogynist attitudes that excluded women and left their texts absent from institutions and the public arena, set the stage for feminism as an organised social movement which emerged to question these erasures, contradictions and absences. Such a long term repression of women's direct participation and textual inclusion in the formation of literary discourse, despite historical textual evidence of their work, was part of the social landscape out of which feminism slowly grew as a collective awareness of discrimination based on sex; an awareness that has been combined with a questioning of social and political structures which institutionalise inequality and dependency as part of the construction of oppression. However, the representation of feminism as a 'women's issues' movement has spilled over and resulted in the marginalisation of women's plays from the early Suffragettes to the writers of modern feminist theatre through the strategy of critical representation as 'plays for women', 'women's theatre', or

simply 'feminist theatre'. Yet distribution and discussion of women's work (and the work of all people regardless of sex, race, or class) is crucial to a more directly representative drama discourse for, as critic and playwright Michelene Wandor points out:

> Often the above phrases are used by misogynists to ghettoise work by women; sometimes they are used by women in a purely defensive manner, and (via the good intentions of a pro-woman perspective) forestall serious discussion and criticism. Such discussion is essential if women are to become a full and challenging part of theatre work. (Drama Spring 1984, emphasis mine; 5)

Such a classification by critics has operated to reduce the scope of the play's audience while simultaneously not requiring them to devote any serious discussion to the social and political implications in the representations of women's texts. Critics have not considered how differences in style and performance space operate to critique the definitions of traditionally accepted forms of dramatic writing and, indeed, theatre itself. It is obvious that what has been missing for women dramatists for so long is the aspect of inclusion and discussion for, while creating a text is a means of action, it is understandable that the writer(s) would want others to read them. However, the representations in women's texts which criticise or question social structures have been depoliticised through being (as I have shown) left out of the discourse in certain specific ways, by critical practices which ignore those themes, and by the resolute classification of the plays as dealing with "women's" issues.

I have examined the metaphysics of this critical term not only for the historical evidence of its marginalising effects, but also to trace the traditional definitions which (re)produced certain belief systems that allowed men in critical positions to perceive women as inferior opposites, and their representations as somehow being essentially domestic, relevant only to women and, therefore, intellectually and socially inconsequential. It is the Aristotelian tradition that has laid the basis for the voicelessness of unauthorised members of society such as

women and slaves, contributing to dominant gender roles and the ironic discourse of femininity whereby definitions of women's identity have been based on an appropriation of their biology and reproductive work, rather than their voices and minds; creating a spiral of silence instead of dialogue and agreement. In addition, the perception of complete separation between public and private domain has resulted in a lack of discussion and dialogue between different spheres of the community, which further characterises the construction of the women's movement as pertaining only to women and domestic issues. I believe that when we deconstruct the concept of 'women's issues' we are looking at a very complex weave, but that some threads can be found hanging loose from the tapestry, and certainly the Aristotelian worldview has something to do with many of those. And in this worldview, representation, dominated by its own structural definitions and metaphysics, in the hands of masculine-defined institutions, has created what can be called the (hu)man discourse which masquerades as universal knowledge of human experience. And this has been achieved by the tradition of privileging the participation of certain classes of men and by promoting certain subjects, while excluding women's participation in the discourse in a very specific way--through the exclusion of their texts and their personal presence from powerful institutions that reproduce texts and organise social practices. The texts of women which represent subjects that contradict the dominant social definitions under a patriarchal reality construct, also act to deconstruct the dominant homogeneous gender definitions, and as such must be excluded from representation in the discourse in order for a patriarchal reality construct to maintain its oppositional roles where men are superior, men are public, men write, and men govern. It is therefore the control of representation using erasure as a tool of dominance in discourse which has constructed the identity of the masculinist (hu)man discourse that excludes the full participation of women in order to maintain its dominant

identity. This has resulted in the historically impossible position of the female artist, where in the (hu)man discourse she is in (op)position to the traditional definitions of her gender, while her subjects function as sites of contradiction and through erasure become subjects for nonproduction, being represented as "women's" issues as if to be read by women and dealt with critically by the "women's" or "feminist" discourse.

PART THREE. The Response to Erasure: Not for Women Only, or Deconstructing the Women's Discourse

Introduction

We are a feelingless people. If we could really feel, the pain would be so great that we would stop all the suffering. If we could feel that one person every six seconds dies of starvation (and as this is happening, this writing, this reading, someone is dying of starvation) we would stop it. If we could really feel it in the bowels, the groin, in the throat, in the breast, we would go into the streets and stop the war, stop slavery, stop the prisons, stop the killings, stop destruction. Ah, I might learn what love is.

When we feel, we will feel the emergency: when we feel the emergency, we will act: when we act, we will change the world.

Julian Beck, The Life of the Theatre

All social structures which institutionalise inequality and dependency are fought out at the level of a micro-politics of deviance and disease.

Bryan Turner, The Body and Society

'I use certain language that is a symptom of the violence of the culture,' Finley insists. 'If I talk about a woman being raped, I have to use the language of the perpetrators' ... Evans and Novak took exception to the fact that at one point Finley spreads chocolate across her naked body in what she describes as 'a symbol of women being treated like dirt ... My work is not about entertainment ... People usually leave my shows crying'. After leaving one of them, her grandmother sent her a note. It was a mixed review that could sum up the dilemma that any unbridled artist poses for the NEA [National Endowment for Art, USA]. 'She said that I was talented ... but also a toiletmouth.'

Richard Lacayo, Time

As Julian Beck says, when we feel the emergency we act, but when women act in ways that are not acceptable to tradition, they are repressed and called "toiletmouths", not "nice" girls. I contend that women playwrights have been acting against social dominance, but have been erased as inferior opposites by the (hu)man discourse, in which they and their plays have been made subjects for nonproduction by a discourse that not only excludes contraditions, but resists critique and does not dialogue with a difference that demands an end to dominance. What is the response to this? In Part Three I want to argue that women have been responding to social dominance for quite some time, for example, through

their playwriting, and through feminism as an organised sociopolitical movement, but this response, like the plays of women, has also been subject to the tactics of erasure as nonreception, and marginalisation, that have reduced this work from a critique about social issues to "women's" issues, of interest only to women.

In Part Three I explore the other discourse involved in "the impossible position of the female artist" who expresses feeling caught between the definitions of two seemingly opposite discourses. I will argue that in reading through the "women's" discourse, one can find textual evidence that feminism, and feminist literary criticism, is not a discourse about or for women only, though it has been represented as such, and that it is not a totally opposite discourse, though it operates as an oppositional critique. After deconstructing the identity and philosophical structures of the (hu)man discourse, I will now address the identity of the other half of the (hu)man/woman dichotomy. In Part One I have identified erasure as nonreception (sustained negative reception coupled with anthological exclusion), through gender biased criticism and a politics of dominance where prejudice operates with and beyond the institutional standards. In Part Two I have deconstructed the identity of the (hu)man discourse as based on essentialist definitions and philosophical structures that have (re)produced this dominance in discourse within the discursive formation of Knowledge, using a politics of interpretation based on the authority of 'real' experience as a dominant practice within literary criticism. With this evidence from Part One and Two in mind, I will selectively read through the "women's" discourse, locating sameness, difference, and traces of erasure where this discourse mimics the traditional assumptions and critical practices of the (hu)man discourse.

In Section (A), "Be(coming) Equal: Social Issues Become 'Women's Issues'", I will argue that the historical construction of women as inferior opposites and their writing as "women's issues", was a reductionism that affected early

and contemporary feminism through the homogeneous representation of feminism as concerned only with equality, i.e. becoming equal in an unchanged social system. This meant that the structural critiques of gender and related socioeconomic power structures have been resisted and erased under the simplistic banner of "equality".

In Section (B), "Feminist Literary Criticism and Men: Closed Doors and Separate Corridors", I will challenge the notions of feminist theory as "theoretically thin" and "separatist", arguing that men have not acknowledged the theoretical diversity of the feminist discourse, nor have they acknowledged their own subjecthood within feminism as a critique of gender that applies to men. I shall argue that because of the biased standards that have excluded women from the mainstream discourse, women have had to mobilise separately to create an environment to read and express difference, yet their critique of gender and power is not only for women, but for men as well. Men who do engage with feminism experience authorial anxiety from not being "female" and therefore able to interpret women's writing "correctly", thus revealing that they are conditioned to a politics of interpretation, with the authority of being "correct" related to 'real' experience.

In Section (C), "Tradition and the Position Mission", I question the myth of theoretical homogeneity and analyse the various positions and oppositions within feminist literary criticism, not only to offer a poststructuralist perspective within feminism, but also within the practice of criticism itself. This discussion will also provide the context for questioning how these positions have affected the development of the genre of feminist drama.

In Section (D), "Defin(d)ing Feminist Drama and the Anti-Canon", I explore the project of defining feminist drama and the problems with establishing a female tradition, a practice that is often resisted by female playwrights. In the project to establish a feminist drama where certain prescriptive and role model demands operate to create yet

another canon, the concern is that this structure mimics the tradition of the (hu)man discourse and excludes women writers from the feminist anti-canon.

In Section (E), "The Impossible Position of the Female Artist: No(Where) Right(?) to (W)rite", I will discuss the impossible position of the modern female artist, discussing the public representation of feminism and how this negative environment has affected the creativity of the female playwright and her critical reception. In the second section I will explore comments from women playwrights themselves that express their alienation, isolation, and fears about critical reception, both from the mainstream and the feminist critical discourses.

The negative representation and reductionism of the feminist discourse by the mainstream media has affected the woman playwright with respect to the mainstream critical reception of her work by labelling her work as "feminist" and therefore only being about women's issues. But it has also negatively affected the perception of the female artist with respect to her wanting to position her work within the feminist discourse. As Lavery admits in her article "But will men like it? Or living as a feminist writer without committing murder" from Susan Todd's collection Women and Theatre, she felt her work was somehow diminished if it was reduced to the label of 'feminist':

> The Great Ear and Two Typing Fingers discovered her mouth. But the Mouth was avoiding the word 'Feminism'. I was full of ... 'No, I wouldn't call my work feminist as such ... it's about people, all people ... no, we don't advertise ourselves as feminist, because we don't want to preach, just to the converted ... while of course I sympathize with a lot of what people in the women's movement are saying ... half the world is men ... yes, of course I like men ... haha goodness me yes....' In the smallest meanest part of my mind, I felt that calling myself a feminist diminished me ... I was Me, the Great but As Yet Undiscovered, Unrecognized Writer. While I was grateful of course to Fervent Feminists, I was, well, you know, much more than that. (27)

Perhaps this is one of the saddest effects of erasure.

A. Be(Coming) Equal: Social Issues as "Women's Issues"

Women have responded to dominance in discourse through the writing of plays, and they have also responded to dominance in the intertextual field of discourse through feminism. From the first wave, feminism as a diverse political movement has challenged the socioeconomic and political structures that produce inequalities; yet like the plays of women, it has suffered erasure tactics of nonreception through the reductionistic representation of its being concerned with "women's issues" rather than social issues. This representation has negatively affected women's equal participation in the intertextual field of discourse and continues to do so, through the marginalisation of women's art, feminism, and feminist literary criticism.

I will argue that its early reception as the "woman's cause" to obtain the vote created the perception of suffrage as a reform pertaining only to women's status of equality, where the arguments centered around women becoming equal to men because they were 'essentially' inferior opposites. This debate effaced early feminism as a movement concerned with gaining equal access to legislative power in order to change already existing socioeconomic structures that affect everyone in an interrelated fashion. The reduction of feminism to a homogeneous demand by women to become equal to men is a representation which has reduced and marginalised (as "women's issues") women's response to social dominance, either in art or in feminism. I will briefly consider the construction of this representation of feminism as "women's issues" rather than human social issues through the following: 1) feminism's first-wave demand for social changes through access to political legislation via the vote for women was subsumed by the fight to prove their equality within an unchanging system; 2) this challenge by women to legislate their own social constructs and the ensuing political and social resistance from male-dominated institutions exposed the traditional assumption of male intellectual superiority--a gender construct dating back at

least to Aristotle's definitions--reflected by the assumption of men's natural right to decide politically the social reality for women; 3) a lack of support from men in various other social movements (which resulted in mostly women working for the feminist cause) provided the visible representation that feminism's social critiques were only "women's issues"; and 4) this classification has not only marginalised the theoretical diversity of the feminist movement, but also repressed its critique of gender as an ideologies and socioeconomic structures.

While certain suffragette plays of the time were propaganda pieces about the vote they also dealt with various social issues. They depicted images of tired women in factories and poverty-stricken servants and, as I have shown in Part One, many other plays by women dealt thematically with several types of social injustices including racial, sexual, and economic discrimination. Early feminists and playwrights working for suffrage have been represented as fighting for the vote, when in fact they were very aware of problems with limited access to education, the professions, contraception, legal property rights, and the economic exploitation of the working class. The vote was seen as a giving a possibility of involvement in legislation over these very issues, rather than being simply an ineffectual token of men's power. Clare Coss quotes Emma Goldman in her poem "Emma":

> Because what you have here is character and situation and the potential for women who are moving together to move away from just carving out for themselves a bigger piece of the capitalist pie. (Not for Women Only 69)

In Australia, the National Women's Consultative Council has circulated a kit called the Political Awareness Seminar for Women, and the following quotations come from these various documents and posters from the suffragette movement that represent their interest in reforming social structures (no page numbers were on these posters in the kit). In "Australian Women Explain: Why We Want the Vote", women in Victoria demand the vote saying:

> Remember that Democracy means Government by the People, and not Government by Half the People.... 1. We are Taxed--Taxation without Representation is Tyranny. 2. We have to obey the laws--Therefore we should have a voice in making them. (Rose Scott Papers, Mitchell Library)

The Women's Christian Temperance Union from New South Wales made a very clever argument based on the Biblical references of male and female togetherness in marriage and, although they claimed an essentially feminine virtue, they still acknowledged the conditions of poverty which contributed to driving women to prostitution:

> God made us a dual humanity. Those whom God has joined together man has persisted in putting asunder in politics, and the result has been a disaster. Witness the social condition of our women, sweated almost to starvation and the awful sacrifice of health and virtue resulting from such conditions. (Rose Scott Papers, Mitchell Library)

It was quite clear that Suffragettes felt they had to legislate in their own interests, writing that "women could not legislate for men; men cannot do so fairly for women", and they also argued that men were not acting on behalf of women, "because some social wrongs which women suffer will not be altered till women use their voting power" (Christian Temperance Union, Rose Scott papers). Masculinist resistance took many forms but was really only based on one argument--women's essential inequality--and that left the Suffragettes no longer arguing about social conditions but for their own equality first, so that they could then represent what they began to call their own interests, or women's wrongs. A central argument against women voting was based on women's lack of intellectual strength; charging that women would vote like their husbands anyway, to which some Suffragettes replied:

> In cases where husband and wife vote together, it will be an additional source of sympathy and bond of union. In cases where they vote differently, they will agree to differ, as they now do in religous matters. A man will not respect his wife less because she has an opinion of her own and is free to express it. (Rose Scott Papers, Mitchell Library)

From a document called "They Say--Well! what do they say?", Mary Lee from South Australia lists several main points of resistance from men, "women are unfit to use the Parliamentary vote; our members of Parliament are the chosen servants of the people; women's need and interests are fairly represented in our Parliament; and our form of democracy is democratic" (Mitchell Library). Lee argues the usual Suffragette platform about taxation and democracy but she also replied that if women were fit to rear the men, they were fit to judge their capacity to make laws, and that:

> While members of Parliament are chosen by men only, they will represent the interests of men first; women's interests may be safely neglected. They can neither put these men in nor turn them out--they have no vote. (Mitchell Library)

The public/domestic separation argument from men was strong and here Lee combined the argument for equality with the demand to legislate social conditions:

> They say: that 'women have no business with public affairs'. Have they no business with equal justice to men and women in our law courts? No business with an equal standard of morality for men and women? No business with the laws which govern our schools--which protect our homes--which restrict the greed of the sweater--which control the treatment of our women and children in the workshops and factories? These are 'public affairs'. (emphasis mine; Mitchell Library)

The widening of the argument from equality with men into their concerns for organising for just social practices, demonstrates an early form of the personal is political, as well as the suffragettes' resistance to social issues being classified as domestic rather than public.

Although it is evident that women activists in Australia and overseas such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Charlotte Perkins Gilman or Emma Goldman were concerned with social structures, and openly criticised the educational, economic, and government practices which created dependency and inequality in their society, their writing has been represented as being part of the women's movement for the vote and thus, concerned only with the 'woman question'. The fact that such a debate was carried on among men alone in Parliament and other male-

dominated institutions, and was referred to as a 'question' indicates that there was a conscious choice involved for men as to how they would resolve the social definitions for women, implying that the matter was not a natural inevitability. The very resistance of many men to women's access to the vote within the political debate, exposed their assumptions of intellectual superiority represented by the exclusive right to decide on whether or not they should consider women as intellectual equals and 'grant' them access to decision-making in legislation. This resistance and the tactic of forcing women to argue their equality is significant in that it reveals a contradiction within the ideology of biological separatism underlying gender roles in the patriarchal society. Despite the claim that separate gender roles were based on natural biology, the very fact of political undecidability and debate revealed that gender was not derived from some 'natural' notion of women as different and equal, but quite obviously was based on perceptual value judgements of women as different and inferior--an attitude which also didn't acknowledge these values as subjective constructions.

Women's textual critiques of social oppression--which should have exposed the ideology of gender construction for both sexes--instead were not seriously considered as representing anything more than women's problems, generally perceived as an inability to adapt to their naturally correct role. The historical definition of a masculinist public realm based on the male experience and perception of life as universally correct, includes regarding women as 'natural' physical and mental inferiors who require the 'protection' of the domestic sphere. In this structure, any discontent expressed by women is regarded as their own adjustment problem and not a fault with the social structures that are based on 'natural' definitions. Thus, any organised political movement by women around such issues would be seen as outside their capabilities and a transgression of their natural social role in the first instance.

The agenda of the suffragette movement not only had to point out that all people as equals deserved the same rights to the vote and therefore access to legislative decision-making for the construction of social systems, but also to confront an emotional, biased perception of male superiority which required them to argue that women were equal in the first place. The next "logical" reduction in locating the argument around women being equal to men meant that the issue was not about an end to oppressive social institutions through more representative legislation, but was about the ideology of sex equality within the existing male-defined power paradigm. The political responses from governments, therefore, have largely been to make legislative moves that grant women more equality with men in an unchanged system where men retain the power of their numbers and influential positions, while gender ideology remains intact.

Another factor that contributed to the perception of early feminism as a 'women's movement' involved the lack of visible political participation by men in the work of gender reform within institutional structures. Despite the platforms of sex equality in other social reform movements such as the socialists, anarchists, and utilitarians, feminism remained an issue about women's equality because it was not seriously incorporated as a critique involving all related socioeconomic constructs that institionalise the belief system of women as inferior others. Generally speaking men did not play an active part in feminism as a social movement and leadership has been in the hands of women. Olive Banks notes in her book Becoming a Feminist: The Social Origins of 'First-Wave' Feminism that "the most striking thing about feminism is the extent to which it has been a movement of women and not just for women" (106). Her work analyses men and women in the early feminist movement in England and she reports that, despite the general lack of male participation in the feminist movement:

> there have been from the first a number of men whose support for feminism went deeper than sympathy and who, by their actions, made a real

> contribution to the progress of 'first-wave' feminism. (106)

While some first-wave feminists worked with these men in other reform causes, most women largely devoted themselves to feminism:

> the most distinguishing feature of the male feminist, however, is the extent to which their feminism was just one amongst a number of causes and not, as in the case of many of the women, the one cause to which they devoted their lives. (109)

This alignment with other reforms may be one reason for some men's reluctance to identify strongly with woman's suffrage, since the link with feminism might affect their credibility in other issues. Richard Pankhurst (a relative of the Pankhurst sisters) discusses this problem in the introduction to the reprint of William Thompson's Appeal of One Half of the Human Race, Women, Against the Pretensions of the Other Half, Men, To Retain Them in Political, and Thence in Civil and Domestic Slavery, which was written with Anna Wheeler and published in 1825 as a rebuttal of James Mill's "Article on Government" written in 1820:

> The subjection of women, though regarded as entirely natural, and acceptable, by society at large, had already been challenged by Mary Wollstonecraft from a woman's point of view, by Godwin, Saint-Simon and Owen from an Anarchist or Socialist standpoint, and by Bentham from that of the Utilitarians. Many of the latter, however, displayed a marked reluctance openly to identify themselves with the women's cause--either because they were afraid of incurring personal opprobrium or ridiculed or because they believed that to do so would destroy their chance of achieving other reforms. (ix)

According to Pankhurst, both Thompson and Wheeler were disappointed at the lack of commitment to women's suffrage by people involved in the anarchist, socialist, and utilitarian movements:

> Thompson and Anna Wheeler were gravely concerned at such 'backsliding' on the part of otherwise enlightened persons whose principles, they felt, ought to have made them unswerving champions of women. As Bentham's personal friends, deeply influenced by Utilitarian thought, they were much grieved when Pierre Dumont of Geneva, one of Bentham's chief followers, and often

> regarded as the philosopher's official spokesman, announced his opposition to women's suffrage. This betrayal, as they saw it, appeared even more serious when Dumont was joined by no less a figure than Bentham's principal British disciple, James Mill. (ix)

Mill had made the argument that political representation could be denied in cases where an individual's interests were included in the interests of those who did have representation:

> In it he expounded the Utilitarian case for democracy in general, but declared it 'pretty clear that all individuals whose interests were 'indisputably included in those of others' could be denied political representation 'without inconvenience'. He stated that this category included not only children, whose interest was 'involved' in that of their parents, but also women, on the ground that the interest of almost all of them was 'involved in that of their fathers or in that of their husbands'. These glib words produced heated controversy among the more progressive Utilitarians, and naturally shocked every supporter of women's emancipation. (x)

Banks' studies show that a higher percentage of women feminists had aligned themselves with socialism which, besides having a general platform of sexual equality, provided an alternative analysis of economic conditions and distribution. She points out that despite the fact that socialism provided a few important male feminists such as Keir Hardie and George Lansbury, large numbers of men simply did not identify with the women's struggle to the extent that both men and women identified with the goals of socialism, and that it was mostly women who did the work (106):

> it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that male socialists, in spite of the movement's ideological commitment to sex equality, felt less sympathetic to the goals of feminism than men whose political commitment was to Liberalism. (108)

But she also suggests that although most English male feminists were liberals, increasing opposition to women's suffrage from the Liberal Party leaders drove women feminists increasingly towards socialism, while the Liberal men deserted the cause:

> The smaller proportion of socialists in the male sample as a whole, therefore, is due to the way in

> which men began to move out of the women's movement at about the time when Liberalism was ceasing to be its dominant political affiliation. (108)

Further, the concept of the family wage and family unit in socialism prevented serious considerations of power relationships within the working-class family, making possible the reconciliation of patriarchy and socialism, but denying the more radical critique of gender offered by feminism:

> Consequently although many socialists were prepared to concede sex equality as a general principle, the actual demands made by feminists frequently appeared at best as trivial or irrelevant. (112)

Though the initial fruitful alliance of socialist and feminist women added more dimension to feminism, "men were less willing to try to reconcile feminism and socialism" (112):

> women's attempts to reconcile socialism and feminism were by no means always successful and, in the last resort distracted many women from feminism altogether, but this was in the long run. (112)

Despite the commitment of some men in the first wave of feminism, the work of theorising gender construction and discrimination based on sex has increasingly been left to women, becoming isolated as a movement pertaining only to women. The underlying attitude of masculinist superiority revealed in the strategic resistance to women's suffrage by men with institutional and political power thus affected feminism's first-wave in a very specific way: the fight for social change through access to political legislation was shifted to another ground, that of proving women were equal in the first instance and therefore could and should act in their own interests to decide social realities. The construction of gender ideologies as they affected men was thus effaced--though it had the potential to critique oppressive social structures which affected both women, men and children--and the political struggle was diverted into an ideology of equality with the masculinist model as the

established norm. These factors and no doubt many more emotional and psychological determinants, contributed to the representation that feminism was only about women's problems, and that its goal was merely to achieve equality in a male-defined system of power structures. It is hard to avoid the spectre of Aristotelian traditional definitions of man as the possessor of superior intellect, bravery and the authoritative voice, as it forms a large cornerstone of the foundations that support ongoing gender assumptions of the (hu)man/woman dichotomy, which in turn make possible the extreme separation of women from public and governing decision-making processes.

Section (B). Feminist Literary Criticism and Men: Closed Doors and Separate Corridors

The discourse of feminist literary criticism has operated in a theoretically and politically diverse fashion to analyse the production of social dominance in discourse, as part of the project of responding to the absence and erasures of women's texts from the Canon. However, it has also suffered the same reductionist representation as being only about and for women, with a "positive" project of recuperating lost texts. This discourse has been accused of being "theoretically thin" and "separatist", yet an historical exploration of this separatist phenomenon reveals it to be a strategy emerging from traditional standards and critical practices of exclusion by the mainstream publications of the (hu)man discourse. Further, the familiar classification of social issues when inscribed by women as being "women's issues" is a reductionist representation that not only denies the diversity of the feminist critique of social dominance, but also contributes to the lack of men's participation in a dialogue with women as to how feminism applies to men. These reductionist and exclusionist practices in discourse are erasure tactics of nonreception, acting to repress dialogue and thus reinforcing the opposition between the masculinist mainstream discourse and the feminist discourse, rather than acknowledging an interrelationship, particularly with respect to critical theory. In the name of "women's issues" men do not fully receive the feminist structural critiques of gender and power, and thus do not have to respond to them nor colloborate on changes. This limiting representation continues to have a negative effect upon the woman playwright such that her work is regarded as being best handled by the "women's" discourse, thus further inhibiting the reading of women's texts by both sexes.

I would like to do a reading of the dialogue represented in Jardine's Men in Feminism, to challenge this separatism as being only the choice of 'man-hating' women rather than as a necessary strategy to enter institutionalised discourse.

This reading also challenges the lack of participation by men who do not see themselves as subjects within feminism--a critique of gender and interrelated socioeconomic power structures that pertains not only to the gender construction of women and femininity, but to men and masculinity. The dialogue on "men in feminism" gives textual evidence that when men try to interact with feminism, they speak of experiencing the anxiety of being able to interpret correctly, the difficulty of having an authoritative or secure position within feminism, or not wanting to impose themselves upon "women's" space. Although the feminist discourse critiques the (hu)man discourse such that they are at times oppositional, this dialogue reveals that they are not fully opposite except in the representation and perception of them as having an essential and gendered identity, i.e. masculinist or woman-centered. These comments by men indicate that they are used to a politics of interpretation with authority, correctness and position based on experience of the 'real' and, since they are not women, they feel no such stability of position within the "women's" discourse of feminism. This is clearly a case of the shoe being on the other foot, and also points to a need to reorient criticism away from this sort of a politics of experience based on essentialist and gendered identities.

I would like to address some of the male responses to the feminist discourse as theoretically thin or separatist through Spivak who writes about the interpretive politics at a symposium on "The Politics of Interpretation" where she notes that Terry Eagleton:

> Having praised feminist criticism (carrying his own name on the list by proxy; see n.20) for its revolutionary-Marxist potential ... proceeds to trash it in three paragraphs; his main contention, feminism is theoretically thin, or separatist. Girls, shape up! (Other Worlds 132)

She then says that "if I were writing specifically on Eagleton on feminism, I should question this unexamined vanguardism of theory" (132) which questions not only the definition of thick theory, but how is that certain men say

that feminist criticism is "theoretically thin"? At the symposium, Spivak notes more stabs at feminists by Davies and Saïd. In particular she notes that Davie "reproaches feminists for not differentiating among women of different countries" (131):

> Where is it acknowledged, for instance, in the vocabulary of feminism that 'woman', as conceived by an American writing about Italians, cannot help but be significantly different from 'woman' as conceived by an Italian looking at Americans? (qtd. in Spivak 131)

His comment reveals an ignorance of the monumental amount of writing in the feminist discourse about the problems and limitations of racial and cultural relativity when theorising about women, as Spivak notes:

> This is of course a ridiculous mistake. The heterogeneity of international feminisms and women's situations across race and class lines is one of the chief concerns of feminist practice and theory today. To document this claim would be to compile a volume of bibliographical data. (131)

Next she highlights Davie's telling of a story about Saïd's mother who had her passport taken away by the British officer once she was married:

> by doing so he made one more vacancy in the quota of permitted immigrants to Palestine from among the dispossessed of war-devasted Europe. The feminist response to this--'Aha, it was the wife's passport that was destroyed, not the husband's'--wholly fails to recognize the outrage that Mrs. Saïd felt, which her son now feels on her behalf. For if the law had been such that the husband took his bride's name, so that it was the man's passport that was destroyed, the outrage would have been just the same. (last emphasis mine; qtd. in Spivak 131)

While Davie is trying to do a simple sex reversal to argue that both sexes can suffer under a particular law, Spivak argues that he is missing the point precisely because it is only under patriarchal law that a woman changes her name:

> If I may descend into unseemly levity for a moment, I will quote my long-deceased father: 'If Grandmother had a beard, she would be Grandfather.' For the point is precisely that in a patriarchal society there are no such laws. (my emphasis; 131)

She then writes that Saïd called for a criticism that would account for "quotidian politics and the struggle for power" (qtd. in Spivak 131). It seems obvious that Saïd does not have a thorough knowledge of the feminist discourse and Spivak points out examples of feminist criticism which have undertaken this project:

> At its best, feminist hermeneutics attempts precisely this. Part of the attempt has been to articulate the relationship between phallocracy and capital, as well as that between phallocracy and the organized Left. I refer Saïd to two representative titles: Zillah R. Eisenstein's Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism and the collection Beyond the Fragments: Feminism and the Making of Socialism. (131-132)

Arguing against the simple homogenisation of feminist literary criticism, Spivak asks Eagleton about the location of such a monolithic discourse:

> First, where does this undifferentiated, undocumented, monolithic feminist criticism hang out? The gesture of constituting such an object in order that it may be appropriated and then devalued has something like a relationship with the constitution of a monolithic Marx, Marxism, and Marxist critics that we have encountered in most of these essays. (emphasis mine; 132)

Though Spivak's text is asking Eagleton to prove where the homogeneous thinness of the entity known as feminist criticism is located, since she argues that, from a wider perspective (probably developed by studying feminist literary criticism seriously), it seems quite heterogeneous, another problem related to access and location emerges.

In the front of The Pirate's Fiancée, Morris produces a long bibliography of women theoreticians and their numerous books addressing a multiplicity of ideological critiques; she notes that many literary theory anthologies continue to come out with predominantly men in them, while the women Morris lists are published in feminist critical collections. While that is a physical aspect of where they hang out; the other aspect is why do they hang out there and not elsewhere? It seems reasonable to argue that the erasure of women from the (hu)man discourse has contributed to their exclusion from the

discourse of literary theory and their subsequent need to locate within feminist publications. This physical aspect may contribute and explain in part the other searing question at stake which is how such an "undifferentiated, undocumented, monolithic" object gets constituted, and then devalued.

Although there is an interrelationship and similarity between the work of the mainstream and feminist discourses, particularly with respect to modern literary theory, this is effaced by the continuing representation of them as opposite, rather than as, at times, oppositional, and worthy of dialogue and acknowledgement. The multiple positions within feminism and feminist literary criticism have developed in the context of a critique of traditional forms of criticism and the mainstream literary canon that excludes women. Thus, this context has provided the interrelated field against which feminism and the practice of feminist literary criticism participates, not only as a critique, but in the questioning of itself to avoid mimicking traditional critical practices and power politics by the (hu)man discourse (although in the next section I will also argue that some assumptions and practices of traditional criticism have been reproduced by the feminist discourse). The transnational discussion in feminism between the materialist criticism of textual production, and the essentialist criticism that defines a female tradition and an aesthetics of sexual difference in language, is part of an ongoing debate between "nature" and "culture". Poststructuralist feminism is a perspective that links and decontructs these oppositions as derivative of the opposition between the literary and the sociological, this in turn resting on the fundamental opposition between 'fiction' and the 'real'. Yet this opposition has been questioned by feminists through the interrelationship with literary experience and social identity, foreshadowing the postmodern concept of the intertextuality of texts and social practice. Although the poststructuralist feminist perspective emerges in relation to

the work of Derrida, I would argue that feminists and the discourse of Woman have long pointed to the link between images and language as they affect the imagination and the construction of Woman and Man in the social field, and thus they have questioned the power structures and vested interests of those who control the representation of these images and language in the production of sexual, political and economic social practices. Accordingly, although the feminist critique of structure and power has perhaps been done differently from prominent French theorists, nevertheless I think that the poststructuralist feminist perspective is also a synthesis of work already done within its own discourse and in relationship to the (hu)man discourse.

Thus the feminist discourse has not done this work alone--separately--but in direct relation with what can be referred to as a 'patriarchal' discourse. As the title of Morris' book The Pirate's Fiancée implies, the discourse of modern literary theory also owes its debt to feminism and feminist literary criticism, not so much in a case for origins but as an acknowledgement of interrelationship, though women's absence from these texts signals that they are not worthy to be included. The feminist discourse has used its diversity, not only to argue definitions of feminism and feminist literary criticism, but to accept its multiple positions, and to examine its own complicity in the production of power structures, in order to avoid simple power reversals. So it is this heterogeneous aspect of feminist studies that has also functioned as its own deconstruction of monolithic power, similar to what Spivak says about "the deconstructive view":

> It is also the deconstructive view that keeps me resisting an essentialist freezing of the concepts of gender, race, and class. I look rather at the repeated agenda of the situational production of those concepts and our complicity in such a production. This aspect of deconstruction will not allow the establishment of a hegemonic 'global theory' of feminism. (emphasis mine; 84)

Yet in "Reading Like a Man" Robert Scholes refers to

similarities between feminism and deconstruction in a rather cynical fashion:

> One of the things that makes the conjunction of feminism and deconstruction interesting is that both positions have difficulty in determining their relationship to order and power. (emphasis mine; Men in Feminism 210)

Here he assumes that feminism and deconstruction are frozen "positions" rather than discourses which question structures and positions that produce particular kinds of "order" and power. It would follow that such discourses would not want to mimic a "relationship to order and power". Therefore part of the difficulties experienced in "determining" such relations is not due to any theoretical deficiency, but rather to a self-reflexivity of their own positional complicity in the production of social "order and power".

In his article "Male Feminism" from Men and Feminism, Stephen Heath addresses Eagleton's position, noting that a wide range of work by feminists might serve to expose the criticism of "theoretically thin" as an uninformed and limited judgment:

> Given theory and reservations, Eagleton's 'theoretically thin' is probably right; he thinks it is. I think the contrary, that if we step outside the bounds of theory and reservations, stop waiting to see 'what a "feminist literary theory" as such might mean' ... we shall find a range of work by feminists (Irigaray and Spivak and Bovenschen and Coward and ... though the point is not to produce an imitation of Eagleton's list of 'major Marxist aestheticians') which can only make the judgment of 'theoretically thin' appear as a gesture of reaction and resistance. (emphasis mine; 12)

Heath also wonders about the validity of this standard notion of judgement:

> Is it helpful, appropriate, feminist for men to stand in judgment of feminism and its theoretical work and its political debates, brandishing an assumed standard of autonomy in the one hand and its foregone dismissal in the other? (12)

Alice Jardine discusses feminists' irritation with men's treatment of feminism in "Men in Feminism: Odor di Uomo or Compagnons de Route?", responding to Heath and other male

critics as she dialogues in letters with Rosi Braidotti:

> But perhaps we are also irritated by the prescription and reduction of complexity that has so far governed so much of men's interventions into feminism ... Alice: Rosi, how long before it becomes no longer a question but an <u>answer</u>, a prescription about how women <u>should</u> go about what they're doing, saying, and writing ... There is then a kind of streamlining of feminism--a suppression of the diversity and disagreement within the movement itself ... Rosi: Yes, in our work we've all tried to come to terms with the complexity of these issues ... don't you think we could ask our male allies to respect this complexity and try to cope with it themselves? (<u>Men in Feminism</u> 57-58)

Perhaps the notions of "theoretically thin" or "undifferentiated homogeneity" or "separatist" stem from perceptions (or lack of) by male critics and publishers who, on one hand, have excluded women from male-dominated journals and, on the other, constituted their own lack of participation in the feminist discourse. Heath also mentions that:

> Barthes one day in conversation: 'you study what you desire or what you fear'. In any formal sense I haven't studied feminism or feminist issues (<u>is formal study anyway the point?</u>) but I have read and thought about and written <u>in relation to it and them</u>, written on matters that are matters with which feminism is concerned--sexual difference, the contemporary construction of sexuality, the imaging and representation of men and women. (emphasis mine; 6)

I would argue that perhaps formal study is precisely the point if there are to be continued sweeping generalisations made about feminist literary criticism with respect to its thinness or homogeneity; its separatism certainly didn't evolve in an innocent void. Jardine articulates feminist irritation a bit further:

> we could get more micropolitical: are we not irritated simply by their professional when not professorial tone so often sandwiched between sharp critiques of one woman writer after another? By their tendency to descend into pathos and apology as soon as they're threatened? ... By their general discursive strategies which indicate that they've heard our <u>demands</u> but haven't <u>adequately read our work</u>? (last emphasis mine; 58)

Male critics such as those mentioned above could not have read widely in the feminist discourse and thus deny the diversity within feminist work that analyses social structures relating to power and its effects from so many perspectives to list only a few: gender roles and equality between the public/private sphere; literary/social representations and the construction of Woman; psychoanalytic explorations of desire, sexuality and language; capitalism and economic distribution; labour and socialism; intersections of race/gender/class in discrimination; women and Third World oppression; ecology and the effects of imperialism; critiques of definitions of sexuality in radical and lesbian feminism; critiques of interrelationship between language, metaphysics, and philosophical constructions of knowledge and literary criticism offered by poststructuralist feminism.

Jardine writes about roughly three groups of male academic critics today:

> 1) First, the Silent Majority: those who neither read nor take into account the enormous body of work produced by feminist intellectuals over the past twenty years ... 2) Then there are those who plug in and out of feminism without changing anything in the overall itinerary of their theory or practice. Three discursive strategies are particularly evident here: a) what I call 'authoritative' writing on women from guys who already have authority; b) men who express sympathy towards feminism and then turn around and pan women's books ... c) those who operate one of the oldest male seductive strategies around: Divide and Conquer. To women they say: I like <u>your</u> work, but not <u>hers</u>; or: feminist theorists are smarter than women's studies advocates; or: only feminists <u>outside</u> of the academy are <u>really</u> radical. 3) But then there is a third group--there are those men who are really trying, really reading and changing. (55-56)

The separation of a feminist discourse is thus marked off by the name feminist, by its critical reception (reactions and resistance), and by the mostly exclusive work of feminists coupled with the lack of men participating in the discourse; where the very social conditions which brought about the 'women's' publishers and journals are a result of exclusion

from the (hu)man discourse. The representation of feminism, like feminist literary criticism, as 'separate' or 'homogeneous' is related to the limited critical perceptions precipitated by the very lack of participation by men to dialogue with women about the ideologies being examined, namely power and its interrelationship with gender, race and class.

Though Heath has not been one of the male critics who make such generalisations, and has participated in writing about matters of concern to feminism, he nonetheless writes that:

> the point after all is that this is a matter <u>for women</u>, that it is their voices and actions that must determine the change and redefinition ... Women are the subjects of feminism, its initiators, its makers, its force; the move and the join from being a woman to being a feminist is the grasp of that subjecthood ... my desire to be a subject there too in feminism--to be a feminist--is then only also the last feint in the long history of <u>their</u> colonization ... I have to realize nevertheless ... that I am not where they are and that I cannot pretend to be ... which is the impossibility of my, men's, relation. (1)

Though Heath says that this does not mean "I can do nothing in my life, that no actions are open to me, that I cannot respond to change for feminism" (1), he still concludes that he cannot be a subject in feminism, as he is not in that position. While I sympathise with Heath's reluctance to move in on the aspect of feminism he sees as their own territory so to speak, I think the matter of men's "impossible relation" to feminism could perhaps be clarified by a broader understanding of what is meant by 'feminism' and 'feminist' and 'subject' thereof; in other words, who is involved. It is important to recognise that a feminist or a Marxist is not a totalised identity and that people can and do maintain multiple ideological aspects with which they identify. Further, even though some women (definitely not all) insist that men cannot be feminists and they can only work to fight sexism, this is a biologically essentialist position which continues to <u>locate gender oppression only within women</u>--

therefore only women can become feminists--but patriarchy is a structure of power and a system where both men and women participate and both suffer from the oppression of limiting definitions.

Feminism in its theories is so much more than liberating a woman from poor self-esteem or restricted gender roles; it does a great deal of theorising about social power structures and oppression with respect to race and class. While Heath goes on to say that "women are not feminists by virtue of the fact alone of being women: feminism is a social-political reality, a struggle, a commitment, women become feminists" (1), he does not seem to recognise that men can also become feminists as soon as they acknowledge that they too are the subjects of feminism in the sociopolitical reality construct of domination and oppression. Further, they can write about their own complicity in maintaining this construct as well as their losses from it (perhaps they don't perceive this bit), rather than always having it pointed out by feminists. Jardine comments:

> Why then would men want to be in feminism if it's about struggle? What do men want to be in--in pain? ... Rosi: 'it's easier for any man to forget the historical fact that is the oppression of women: it's one of their favorite blind spots'. (58)

I have quoted Heath elsewhere stating that it is difficult for men to recognise their own constructions of masculinity as contributing to the oppression of women; but this is precisely the point where they can then acknowledge themselves as subjects for an analysis of how they are oppressed under the same reality constructs. This may mean examining what they themselves have lost in the name of Masculinity, Philosophy, Science, Fascism, Capitalism and other 'isms' that promote the interests of some while excluding others. It is important for men to examine what they have contributed by their action or inaction to the domination and exploitation in regimes that privilege things like reason, logic, brute strength, competition, some people's hard work, development at all costs and

institutional hierarchies, while at the same time devaluing all that has been excluded as weak, all that has suffered as vulnerable and small, all that has not counted in national budgets--like the unpaid work and the real human and environmental costs of reproducing humanity from the business-as-usual practices of making hard economic decisions.

Jardine reflects on the participation of men that is not representative of struggle nor of a feeling of the position of pain, but is more of a certain language or technique of analysis:

> What are the mechanisms, linguistic and otherwise, whereby these men are able to evacuate questions of their sexuality, their subjectivity, their relationship to language from their sympathetic texts on 'feminism', on 'woman', on 'feminine identity?' Most difficult of all is that these few men, our allies, have learned their lessons well. The actual 'content' of their writing is rarely incorrect per se. it is almost as if they have learned a new vocabulary perfectly, but have not paid enough attention to syntax or intonation. When they write of us--always of us--their bodies would seem to know nothing of the new language they've learned. (emphasis mine; 56)

Now Heath responds to this by "unpacking" his honest "primary reaction", a:

> defensiveness [that] ran as a strand through any number of other moments of response--annoyed, resigned, argumentative, submissive ... Alice's statements appeared to me as a familiar, though kindly, representation of the sort of suspicion which female feminists often have of male feminists; ... precisely the fear of being excluded--and a desire to vindicate myself in relation to the other's demands ... Even though Alice speaks of me and other men as allies, we're clearly not able to do quite the right thing. (36)

Heath's authorial anxiety over being "not doing quite the right thing", allows him to feel the pain and fear of being excluded which women writers have felt for a long time due to both hostile critical reviews and institutional exclusion. The possibility of "correctness" is constituted by the notions of position and authority according to the prescribed

rules and standards of a dominant identity in discourse, like 'patriarchal' or 'woman-centred', such that the metaphorical shoe is relative to what kind of shoe it is, whose foot wears it and where the foot is in relation to other shoes. In Heath's second article in the collection, "Men in Feminism: Men and Feminist Theory", he tries to locate his irritation over Jardine's comments and comes around to looking at the intersection of correctness and position:

> I do think that men want very much to know <u>where they are</u> vis-à-vis feminism, that feminism can quickly be produced by them as a matter of their place (and so of its)....To be in or out, that is the question we readily get ourselves into: gaining, obtaining, maintaining, sustaining, <u>fixing</u> a place, a position, ours....Part of the difficulty is to do with 'correctness', the problem men, we, can have, again, of protecting--of self-protecting--position. I want to be somewhere <u>securely</u>. (42-44)

In thinking through this need for a secure position, with the need to be correct as a defense against the criticism of others, Heath quotes Derrida on feminism:

> Can one not say, in Nietzsche's language, that there is a 'reactive' feminism, and that a certain historical necessity often puts this form of feminism in power in today's organized struggles? Perhaps one should not so much combat it head on--other interests would be at stake in such a move--as prevent its occupying the entire terrain. (qtd. in Heath 43)

As Heath notes, all this talk of position, "combat" and "occupying terrain" takes on the significations of threat and danger, assuming the adoption of a territorial wargame going on, with feminism perceived as wanting to move in and take over the "entire terrain" as a new monolithic power structure which will replace the current male-dominant hierarchy. In an intertextual network where origins are lost in a chain of historical events and significations, how can one begin to locate the <u>original</u> impulse defined in the notion of 'active' as an isolated initiative, as opposed to the word "reactive" with its slightly hysterical connotations--although the reactive term at least more honestly acknowledges itself as linked to related forces? Heath writes that Derrida:

> writes reactively, against what he calls '"reactive" feminism' which he grants may have a certain historical necessity but which must not, obviously, be allowed to occupy the whole terrain, back with a vengeance to locus and place--where is mine going to be? ... '"Reactive" feminism' sounds like women's movement and struggle, in reaction--precisely--against oppression, against the sexual terms of existing social reality. Identifying it as such, as '"reactive" feminism', is the male vision; and from that identification it is then seen as 'occupying the entire terrain', or about to ... dangerously, a threat. (emphasis mine; 43)

Although Derrida challenges the idea of place, Heath argues that his naming of feminism as "reactive" and referring to the "terrain" suggests the struggle for position through opposition rather than through responsibility and interrelatedness. It classifies feminism as another separate ideology in the struggle for controlling positions in space, rather than as critiques emerging from an already constituted discourse that produced women's oppression and silence.

The persistent lack of acknowledgement by men of their own subjecthood within feminist theory, and the denial of their complicity in the production of male dominance, results in the separatism of feminist theory as 'women's' studies, where male critics feel so unsure of a secure position and correctness. Heath quotes Paul Smith who in thinking through feminist theory says he feels "that it's impossible to say anything properly correct" (44):

> But then her point is that correctness is not the point: being properly correct is purely theoretical, pure theory; the reality is different, is unceasing, contradictory, difficult, heterogeneous, impossible, everyday. My problem as a man is not being properly correct--as Jardine suggests, men can be extremely good at that, staking out their right place--but acknowledging that my relation to feminism is not going to be some simple recognition ... that it must change me beyond any position to fall back on, beyond any foregone security. (emphasis mine; 45)

The "foregone security" not only arises from knowledge of position, but from the position of knowledge, of coming from a place of authority. The judgement of the author is not only defined by the critic's position in relation to the

dominant standards of a dominant discourse (included or excluded), but is also very much a prescriptive critical practice that preserves the dominant identity of the discourse through appealing to the concept of authentic authority based on a politics of experience. Robert Scholes remarks in "Reading Like a Man" that women need to rely on their experience as a validation of their interpretations of women's writing as authoritative:

> Feminists claim a purpose and an authority that is based on their membership in a class extending beyond the bounds of academic institutions and their discourses. A male critic, for instance, may work within the feminist paradigm but never be a full-fledged member of the class of feminists. On the same problems, the same texts, he will never work with the authority of a woman. (emphasis mine; Men in Feminism 207)

This statement reversed, indicates that within the (hu)man discourse, dominated by male writers supposedly representing universal experiences, women will also never work with the authority of a man, and, hence, as we have seen, the exclusion of erasure. However, it is not accurate to say that all feminists claim authority based on some homogeneous experience of being a woman, and not all feminists are engaged in a politics of experience. What Scholes is suggesting is the continuing opposition between the writings of men and women with authentically-sexed critics to interpret what is 'contained' in each text according to what sex it 'reflects'. Scholes writes as if the experiences of each sex were natural, isolated, and could be reflected purely objectively; as if those texts were not the results of generations of texts in an intertextual discourse. Heath realises that perhaps he makes an incorrect assumption, "I might well be mistaking Alice's comments" (37), and that Jardine is not defending some "definitional integrity" (37) in feminist discourse that male critics have transgressed. He doesn't seem to know what the "tone or syntax" is except that men could address the issue of their bodies. I think she is referring to something missing in men's participation in feminism, some expression of feeling and commitment that

comes across from "syntax or intonation" but which is more tangible because it is a recognition of pain and struggle reflected in the body, in action and in work. Jardine gives some concrete advice on what might be missing from men who want to be "in" feminism--their work--and I will quote her at length:

> If you will forgive me my directness, we do not want you to mimic us, to become the same as us; we don't want your pathos or your guilt; and we don't even want your admiration (even if its nice to get it once in a while). What we want, I would even say what we need, is your work. We need you to get down to serious work. And like all serious work, that involves struggle and pain. As guide to that work, I would like to remind you of a sentence by Hélène Cixous--a sentence which, to my knowledge, has not been taken seriously by our allies at all: 'men still have everything to say about their own sexuality'. You still have everything to say about your own sexuality: that's a challenge, if it helps you to think of it that way ... And, in closing, since none of the three men's papers today addressed that question, and indeed, posited it as unanswerable, I would like to offer a short and pragmatic agenda for beginning this vast work which has yet to begin. (60)

In his second article Heath now actually likes "intonation" when he compares it to hearing because "hearing can serve as terms for the kind of recognition feminism involves: women's voices, women's experience, women's facts; not just an object 'feminist theory', nor just that representation" (45). This borders on empathy with women's pain, but perhaps still doesn't sufficiently recognise men's own experiences, their own sexuality, their own oppression and inequality involved in the production of women's pain. Both Jardine and Heath note Smith's suggestion that, "the intellectual task of understanding feminist theory is not a problem since feminist theory is situated within the array of post-structuralist discourses with which many of us are now perhaps over-familiar" (qtd. in Heath 41), and therefore the problem lies elsewhere. As long as the purpose and politics of criticism remain traditional, I do not think these writers are over-familiar with the politics of poststructuralism. And I might suggest the problem is a lack of motivation by men to attend

to men's bodies, men's sexuality and men's power as they participate in constructing systems that confer benefits upon privileged members, while disempowering others. This study, of course, means work and change and transformation of traditional structures, as well as relinquishing power through the sharing of it. Heath explores this problem:

> The understanding of feminist theory, quite simply of feminism, is a huge problem for men, for us, because it involves grasping the fact that it is not another discourse (let alone in a poststructuralist array), not another voice to be added, an approach to be remembered and catered for, but that it radically affects and shifts everything and that that radical shift is not negotiable--the old understanding--in such panic terms as 'occupying the entire terrain', is not translatable into a problem of 'inclusion'/'exclusion'. It is easy for me to say that--an image of self-righteouslness is quick to form, I know--but the point is to live it, including in theory, in writing, teaching and so on. (44)

Heath concludes that "the hardest thing is that feminism is ordinary, everyday, and a 'change of world'" (45) and ends his second essay with:

> But where does that leave us? What should we do? There is no ready answer (that would be an easing), we just have to learn. All I can say here and now in the MLA, in this context, is that we should probably start by trying to grasp who we are as men, asking that from feminism rather than wondering what 'they' want from an assumed male us ... and could 'men in feminism' today be anything but another strategy of that, of our imposition? (45)

In this context the situation is still passive, Heath and men must simply learn by asking feminism "who we are as men" (must someone else tell them?), and while this is a beginning of considering themselves as subjects within feminism, Heath still concludes rather glumly that their participation is bound to be another imposition. In reply to Heath's question, "what should we do?" Jardine suggests:

> I think that you--our male allies--should issue a moratorium on talking about feminism/women/femininity/female sexuality/feminine identity/etc. It is much easier to speak about women than to speak as a body-coded

male--to imagine a new man. (Men 60)

She then gives a more pragmatic list of suggestions involving teaching, theory, and practice, and I believe it is worthwhile quoting most of her list as it indicates the depth of the lack of participation by most men when considering themselves and their subjecthood in feminist studies--a lack of participation that has contributed largely to the marginalisation of feminist work as only 'women's studies':

> 1) Echoing Heath, you can stop being sophisticated in theory and politically naive in practice--for example, you can help stop the killing of women's books in reviews ... Or stop your colleagues--when not yourself--from leaving them out, or simply dismissing them.
> 2) You could read women's writing--write on it and teach it.
> 3) You could sponsor women students (as long as we're going to remain in the institution).
> 4) You could recognize your debts to feminism in writing.
> 5) While doing so, you could watch out for the 'shoulds' and 'should-nots' and especially stop being so reductive. Please don't make a mythology--in the Barthesian sense--out of feminism.
> 6) You could critique your male colleagues on the issue of feminism--although I warn you that this is likely to make you very unpopular.
> 7) And the most important, you yourselves could stop being reactive to feminism and start being active feminists--your cultural positionality as men allows you to!
> And what about in the realm of theory? Here the list is endless. You have at least twenty years of feminist theory to take seriously (emphasis mine) ... you could take on--as men after feminism--some of the symbolic fields most addressed by feminist theory: ... from cinematic theory, the symbolic hegemony of vision as organizing metaphor of patriarchal history; or men's relationship to technology, weapons, and war. Or Sports--what is going on in the male psyche with these bats and balls and nets? In the deeper realms of psychoanalytic inquiry, ... you have not even begun to think about your mothers. Nor have you rewritten your relationship to your fathers ... how would a male critic after feminism rewrite Harold Bloom's Anxiety of Influence?
> What else? Well, there's men's relationship after feminism, to death, scopophilia, fetishism ... the penis and balls, erection, ejaculation (not to mention the phallus), madness, paranoia, homosexuality, blood, tactile pleasure, pleasure

> in general, desire (but, please, not with an anonymously universal capital D) voyeurism, etc. Now this would be talking your body, not talking about it. It is not essentialism; it is not metaphysics, and it is not/would not be representation. As Luce Irigaray put it, 'the bodily in man is what metaphysics has never touched....' On a more literary note, do theories of narrative structure in the male realm always have to be modeled upon traditional male desire: beginning, middle, end? What about problems of enunciation, voice, and silence? Can you think through the heterogeneity of the subject without putting the burden of the demised universal subject onto the female? (emphasis mine). And most important, when you're reading men's books, whether new or old, are you up to taking Nietzsche seriously?:
>
> > What has the Man not been able to talk about?
> > What is the Man hiding?
> > In what respect is the Man mistaken?
>
> You see, you have all of your work before you, not behind you. We as feminists, need your work ... We need you as travelling compagnons into the twenty-first century. (Men in Feminism 60-61)

I think it's important to add that, although Jardine says that men speaking their bodies would not be representation, it is perhaps more a way of saying that even though all language is in fact representation, men don't have to continue to emphasise or be limited by the binary metaphysics of opposition when they deconstruct their own position; and they don't have to be afraid of reproducing themselves endlessly as dominant males within 'representation' or 'essentialism'. They can address their own 'representation as essential males' in the social construction of masculinity and explore how that translates into social practices having to do with politics, economics and education; as well as how those practices relate with such situations as domestic violence, murder, rape, incest and sexual abuse. And they can do all this without speaking of themselves as essential males and fixed masculinity--in other words they can speak their bodies and their actions as constructs, which leaves the possibility open for change. As Jardine says:

> I do not agree with Smith or Heath that to work through your male sexuality would only reproduce what's come before, reproduce the phallocentric

> imaginary. Not if you've really read and lived feminist work, which I think some of you have. (Men 60)

But it is that very masculinity which seems impossible to question and, interestingly, Heath says:

> Perhaps it is almost that 'feminine' and 'femininity' should be scrapped, their use abandoned; they come too loaded with the image, the construction, the monolithic male definition of the 'qualities' of women-woman. But not 'masculine' and 'masculinity', which can be used each time to name the elements of a system that assures male domination. (15)

It is not possible to scrap an essential feminine as "loaded with monolithic male definitions" while continuing to ignore the monolithic male definitions for masculinity, as if these were somehow reflective of the natural state for men, against some neutral unchanging background. If the positions based on some inherent essence are ever to be put to rest, then a structure of power which has been appropriated by a male-dominant sex-role system must also not continue to be named as "masculine" so that the monolithic constructions of masculinity within such a system can be uncovered and transformed. Perhaps with the participation of male and female subjects from so-called oppositional positions, such as the 'mainstream' academy and 'women's studies' we might see what Derrida writes about in "Women in the Beehive" that after using the feminine force to deconstruct phallogocentrism, the real challenge of the second stage is "to give up the opposition between men and women", and this is not only in language but in the belief system of male and female as opposite humans, not just opposite sex (emphasis mine; Men in Feminism 194). If that should happen, perhaps Spivak's conclusion to her article, "The Politics of Interpretation" on the symposium of the same name, would not be necessary to write:

> In a report on our symposium in the Chicago Grey City Journal, Ken Wissoker said about my inclusion in the panel: 'She was there, I assume, because she translated Derrida's Of Grammatology'. Reading those words, Elizabeth Abel's long and gracious letter of invitation to me came to mind. It was my

point of view as a Third World feminist that she had hoped would enhance the proceedings. Apart from a pious remark that the maids upstairs in the guest quarters were women of color and a show of sentiment, involving Thomas Macaulay, when Saïd and I held the stage for a moment, the Third World seemed exorbitant to our concerns. As I reflected upon the cumulative politics of our gathering, that seems to strike the harshest note. (emphasis mine; Other Worlds 133).

C. Tradition and The Position Mission

Certainly the critical (non)reception of women playwrights by historical mainstream critics has made it necessary for feminist literary criticism to expose the limitations of traditional literary criticism's values and approaches to women's writing. Yet it is also necessary to think about the ways in which positions are constructed within the discourse of feminist literary criticism, not only to avoid mimicking the essentialism of gender biased practices of erasure as evidenced in the (hu)man discourse, but also to question the practice of literary criticism in response to the difficulties of women playwrights who express feeling as if they are caught between the critical expectations of mainstream criticism and the hopes and critical expectations of feminist criticism (discussed in Section E).

In the process of such a critique, and the search for alternative strategies for reading and analysis, there has been a range of approaches produced in feminist literary criticism that have inevitably affected the defining of feminist drama, including a questioning of the theoretical basis of the practice of literary criticism itself. Within this debate there is an ongoing struggle between the impulse to redefine and recuperate a more positive, less oppressive definition of woman, along with the project to deconstruct biological essentialism and related conditions of material oppression. The basic opposition set up by this struggle within the discourse of feminist literary criticism is between the essentialism of a 'feminine' tradition and aesthetics, and the materialist analysis of gender as a social construct. I see the poststructuralist critique as offering a deconstruction of this opposition which in fact depends on the opposition between the literary and the sociological, as differentiated by the 'real' world and the 'fictional' text. This opposition gives way in the intertextual field of discourse where all interpretations are textual constructs, and in this sense, whether they pertain

to the 'literary' or the 'social', they can be regarded as both real and fictional constructs. I will argue that a practice of feminist criticism which works within a broader concept of heterogeneous ideology and thus with a politics not organised simply around being female, can deconstruct oppression as interrelated with gender, class and race; it can consider its own complicity in the construction of power; and it can refuse to mimic structures of the (hu)man discourse (like a gender biased tradition and canon). Such a practice emerging from this debate can be a nongendered, nonessentialist approach that represents a more malleable 'position' that is not simply reducible to a simple binary opposition, and which can be a consolidation of many interrelated aspects of feminist theory that address the structures of gender and power. It is the limitations of this notion of 'positions' based on (op)positions, as discussed within feminist literary criticism, that I want to explore as providing the context for my next section on defin(d)ing feminist drama; representing a choice between recreating another politics of interpretation and experience, as compared to developing a politics of textuality and what John Frow refers to as a "new understanding of the ends of textual study" (Inaugural Lecture 7), to be discussed in Part Four (C).

An interesting part of the discourse of feminism is the somewhat contradictory struggle between the project that appeals to a positive notion of femaleness to redefine women and femininity in ways that are different from patriarchal definitions, with the project to deconstruct the biological essentialism of 'natural' definitions for Woman, the feminine, and subsequent gender roles. The latter project rejects the 'natural' explanations for gender, and instead confronts the way representations of femininity and masculinity have operated as ideological definitions in a social context that crystallise into cultural, economic and political inequalities. In an essentialist vein, the descriptive and prescriptive approach seeks to uncover and

reproduce a definitive feminine aesthetics and a literary tradition in women's writing that has presumably been marginalised or 'unread' in the framework of patriarchal forms of discourse, criticism, and the notion of a 'man-made' language. This is at odds with the materialist approach which rejects the notion of 'feminine' or 'aesthetics' in favour of the text as a social construct related with power--and thus examines the intertextual elements of gender representation, historical materialism, and ideology as part of the textual significations that help to reproduce power differentials in gender and economic oppression.

Essential Matter

The first project attempts positively to redefine women in a notion of women's presence, their femaleness, and their writing as affirmative. Kay Turner quotes Mary Daly in "Contemporary Feminist Rituals":

> The women's revolution is not merely about equality within a patriarchal society (a contradiction in terms). It is about power and redefining power. Within patriarchy, power is generally understood as power over people, the environment, things. In the rising consciousness of women, power is experienced as power of presence to ourselves and to each other, as we affirm our own being against and beyond the alienated identity bestowed upon us within the patriarchy. (Politics of Women's Spirituality 225)

Where such an affirmative project has problems is when it tries to base this power of positive redefinition by appealing to a natural or even superior 'essence' as it searches for the feminine nature, body, writing, or tradition untainted by men or patriarchal preconceptions. For example, Moi points out in Sexual/Textual Politics, that while Hélène Cixous seems to be appropriating anti-essentialist and anti-biologistic stances of Derridean theory and arguing against terms like écriture féminine or 'feminine writing' which incorporate the binary logic of masculine and feminine, she nevertheless describes a feminine libidinal writing in La Jeune Née:

> Femininity in writing can be discerned in a privileging of the voice: 'writing and voice ...

> are woven together' (JN, 170). The speaking woman is entirely her voice: 'she physically materializes what she's thinking; she signifies it with her body' ('Medusa', 251/44, JN, 170). Woman, in other words, is wholly and physically present in her voice--and writing is no more than the extension of this self-identical prolongation of the speech act. The voice in each woman, moreover, is not only her own, but springs from the deepest layers of her psyche: her own speech becomes the echo of the primeval song she once heard, the voice the incarnation of the 'first voice of love which all women preserve alive ... in each woman sings the first nameless love' (qtd. in Moi 114)

According to Moi, "every time a Derridean idea is evoked, it is opposed and undercut by a vision of woman's writing steeped in the very metaphysics of presence she claims she is out to unmask" (110). It seems that linking patterns of behaviour and writing structures to the masculine or feminine is anti-biologistic as long as the terms are recognised as representing gender: that which is socially constructed as masculine or feminine. But the slide from the constructed, gendered term to the essentialism of assumed 'natural' and biologically derived qualities is all too easy.

Discussing gendered language, Moi quotes Cheris Kramarae who defines sexism in language "as the way in which the 'English lexicon is a structure organized to glorify maleness and ignore, trivialize or derogate femaleness'" (156). In Man Made Language Dale Spender also makes a similar assertion:

> The English language has been literally man made and ... it is still primarily under male control ... This monopoly over language is one of the means by which males have ensured their own primacy, and consequently have ensured the invisibility or 'other' nature of females, and this primacy is perpetuated while women continue to use, unchanged, the language which we have inherited. (emphasis mine; qtd. in Moi 156)

Locating sexism in language by seeing language as a male structure again charges the structure itself with having some inherent sexual essence, rather than analysing sexual bias as difference expressed in the social context of interpretation:

> This is not 'merely' a theoretical point: even if we grant the viability of the project of locating

> sexism in language (and after all, as we shall see, even Kristeva concedes that language is also in some way structured), we immediately run into problems. For if we hold with Volosinov and Kristeva that all meaning is contextual, it follows that isolated words or general syntactical structures have no meaning until we provide a context for them. How then can they be defined as either sexist or non-sexist per se? (157)

This position also negates the participation of women in language within the social context, and lays the blame on an original conspiracy by men:

> If it is the case, as Thorne and Henley argue, that similar speech by men and by women tends to be interpreted quite differently, then there is surely nothing inherent in any given word or phrase that can always and forever be constructed as sexist. The crudely conspiratorial theory of language as 'man-made', or as a male plot against women, posits an origin (men's plotting) to language, a kind of non-linguistic transcendental signifier for which it is impossible to find any kind of theoretical support. (157)

Thus the notion of sexual difference in language remains embroiled within the framework of an oppositional dichotomy. The detailing of sexual difference in this fashion tends to efface the intertextual construction of such differences through the control of representation, whereby the interpretations of false gender unities are promoted, while the appearances of 'difference' in the texts of both men and women are marginalised. Moi argues that because these differences are produced by both sexes, no valid conclusions can be made to locate them by sex:

> As far as the study of sex differences in language goes, any analysis of isolated fragments (sentences) in literature, as for instance in the much-quoted case of Virginia Woolf's theory of the 'woman's sentence', will warrant no specific conclusions whatever, since the very same structures can be found in male writers (Proust, for example, or other modernists). (Moi 155)

If there were such a thing as a man-made language that was unified and subject to closure, then it would be impossible for the discourse to produce feminist significations. The notion therefore that male dominance has been produced by male language, and that a release from oppression lies in

discovering or creating a female language, remains trapped within locating sexual essence in the boundaries of things rather than as produced in the particular context of a struggle for power, and also ignores the positive participation of women in that struggle with language:

> The question of sexism is a question of the power relationship between the sexes, and this power struggle will of course be part of the <u>context</u> of all utterances under patriarchy. It does not follow, however, that in each and every individual case the feminine interlocutor will emerge as the underdog. (157)

The appeal to a feminine essence for a positive definition for women's writing is mimicking the same essentialist and sexist assumptions about the 'natural' superiority of the male body and mind. Moi points out that:

> Definitions can certainly be constructive. But--and this is the point overlooked by such arguments--they can also be constraining. As we have seen, many French feminists reject labels and names, and 'isms' in particular--even 'feminism' and 'sexism'--because they see such labelling activity as betraying a phallogocentric drive to stabilize, organise and rationalize our conceptual universe. They argue that it is masculine rationality that has always privileged reason, order, unity and lucidity, and that it has done so by silencing and excluding the irrationality, chaos and fragmentation <u>that has come to represent femininity</u>. (emphasis mine; 159-160)

The key point here is that these qualities have only been represented and produced with the gendered labels of masculine and feminine. As Moi argues:

> My own view is that such conceptual terms are at once politically crucial and ultimately metaphysical; it is necessary at once to deconstruct the opposition between traditionally 'masculine' and traditionally 'feminine' values <u>and</u> to confront the full political force and reality of such categories. We must aim for a society in which we have ceased to categorize logic, conceptualization and rationality as 'masculine', <u>not for one from which these virtues have been expelled altogether as 'unfeminine'</u>. (emphasis mine; 160)

Such definitions have never been completely totalised or unified, nor ever derivative of any 'real' essence that had

not been interpreted and construed by the dominant vested interests of Knowledge, ideology and power.

Similarly, critics who reinforce traditional gender values by classifying work in terms of 'female' plays do a disservice to the community, not only by encouraging the separatism which keeps men and women from trying to understand each other's work, but also by prejudging the audience's ability to receive work that might be confrontational. An interesting case in point is a review by Helen Musa of In The Secret Room, a play about domestic violence written by Australian playwright Kate McNamara:

> It has to be said that In The Secret Room is not for everyone. In particular, men would be well-advised to think twice before venturing into this evening of theatre for women--an evening which illuminates the dreams of Everywoman, while inevitably hitting out at the inexplicable violence of Everyman. (Canberra Times, 8 August 1988, p 14)

Another female reviewer on ABC radio, Victoria Edgar, encouraged men to see the play because "it shows the strength and sensitivity of women" and such representations are important to raising discussion about the issue of domestic violence (8 August 1988). Fortunately there were several Letters to the Editor by men that refuted Musa's assumptions about male interest and ability to confront unpleasant issues:

> My thanks to your theatre critic, Helen Musa, for her solicitous concern about the threat to my tender male sensitivities posed by TAU's production, In The Secret Room. Unfortunately I saw the play before reading the review and deluded myself that it was an informative and valuable piece of theatre. But I've now realised the error of my ways. Without the benefit of Ms Musa's words spread like bedraggled chook feathers to shelter us timorous men from the feminist storm, I stood open to be confronted by the play. To protect me from myself in the future, I suggest there is a higher calling for Ms Musa. What we need is a new Dr. Bowdler, especially for the besieged middle-class sons of the Blainey dreaming. Someone who can sanitise everything that presumes to challenge us to think about ourselves, leaving us safe and comfortable in our theatre seats. Someone who will protect us from the opinions of women or anyone

> else who seeks to confront us with disturbing truths about the world. Someone who will ensure that playwrights who wish to speak out on behalf of those whose circumstances force silence on them also remain silent. Mind you, building a new theatre of the insipid will not be easy. There is much to be done, many discomfiting works from the past to be musalated. Perhaps Ms Musa could start with Euripides and work forwards. That may mean she no longer has time to cobble together any more shallow reviews for your paper, but there's always a price to pay for progress. (Peter Wise, Canberra Times, 12 August 1988, p 8)

Traditional assumptions about femininity and masculinity have long served as a justification for a history of separatism between the "opposite" male and female organised around the public and private realms, with subsequent domination and exclusion of women from positions of definitive power in institutional, legal, political, economic and cultural realms. And although feminism and feminist literary criticism had to mobilise separately because of this exclusion, nevertheless mimicking the separatism of gender biased essentialism that privileges difference rather than resemblance cannot be a longterm useful strategy in feminist literary criticism for transforming traditional conceptions of gender and power, nor for encouraging dialogue between male and female.

The materialist position in feminist literary criticism is found wanting by some feminists, and Maggie Humm argues that it lacks a viable means of judging aesthetic and literary value, since for English feminist critics the text alone cannot provide the signifying opposition (Women's Writing 99). The tension between what Humm calls 'materialist' versus 'literary' criticism, is that the materialist approach seems to "ignore" aesthetics and literary value. However, the power invested in institutions to construct the dominant notion of good aesthetics and hence literary value is precisely what is under critique in the materialist project (the construction of authority and belief systems through control of representation by institutions).

Humm maintains there is a refusal of an aesthetic value evident in English work which uses cultural writers to understand how literary traditions and educational institutions oppress women. Marxist-feminism concentrates on the ideological construction of women's exploitation in the work and family ethic and in media representation, while linking historical materialism with definitions of women in literature (99-100). But Humm's problem with English materialist criticism is centered around aesthetics and the necessity for literary value:

> Although feminist work, in England, on the genre of romantic fiction has enlarged the boundaries of what we can call 'literature' there are weaknesses in the approach as an explanation of literary patterning. By describing ethnographically the role of literary culture within women's experience, this criticism has often refused any framework of 'good' or 'bad' representation aesthetically. Meaning then can only be the result of a changing interaction between particular verbal forms and socially constructed readers. While the notion of meaning, in this sense, as an ideological force is often very well demonstrated, it ignores the whole issue of literary value. (100)

A materialist or feminist/Marxist project does not explain "literary patterning" in terms of judging an aesthetic good/bad value, but demonstrates the interrelationship of ideology, economics and cultural practices in the construction of multiple significations for a text, specifically relating to its production or nonproduction in the social field. The critical practice of determining what a text means, and whether it is aesthetically good or bad value (for money) is exactly what underlies a politics of interpretation that operates in the literary canon. The project to "explain literary patterning" for judging literary value thus derives from a historically essentialist position which defines knowledge as certain observable 'natural' tendencies; for example that women writers use a great deal of oven imagery, small details or parlours, while male writers are rather better at representing larger universal issues such as war or politics. As I have shown, the

subjective nature of the critics and their own ideological belief systems dramatically alter the act of judging 'literary' value such that they do not only objectively observe a text according to a prescribed standard, but they actually impose their own values in the process of interpretation and thus reproduce a tradition. In an interview by Dinah Leavitt, playwright Megan Terry responds angrily to the question of whether we should look for a feminist or feminine aesthetic:

> I'm always fighting against critics because so many are biased whether they are feminist critics or male critics. They always want you to conform to whatever party line they're putting out ... They want to use the artist to push whatever line they want. It's the duty of the artist to criticize everybody including herself and her attitudes. The feminist movement needs some criticism from artists so that we don't get so hidebound and serious. I refuse to be used. (Women in American Theatre 289)

An important point of materialist criticism though, is that the masculinist tradition which has marginalised women writers by controlling representation according to a certain set of standards will not be undermined by a practice of defining a feminine tradition for the purpose of egalitarianism in canonical texts.

Thus the derivation of a feminine aesthetics that works on defining what is specifically female about a women's tradition, language or culture, is not only a mirror reversal of the male essentialism, looking to nature for a 'real' authoritative referent and position, but it is a policy that considers the text as an object to be judged quite apart from the political and economic environment which has facilitated its production or nonproduction. On the other hand, the materialist project of uncovering cultural ideologies involved with textual production refuses to agree that it is only a literary experience that forms the basis from which an aesthetic good/bad value judgement can be made, or that this judgement is ever objective or apolitical. However, this position need not ignore the style, form or representations of the text as being part of an aesthetic 'literary'

experience that can also perform cultural work in a counter-discursive fashion by displacing dominant structures in the intertextual field of discourse.

These oppositions can be seen as the fundamental struggle for a basis of critical authority between positions of judgement based on essentialism (nature) or materialism, (social construct). However, the female tradition depends upon a notion of the real reflected in the literary, while the materialist depends upon the social referent as real. Their opposition is deconstructed by the intertextual field of discourse where all texts are 'real' and fictional and social constructs, such that the validity of experience reflected in the literary text and the social referent is being questioned as a dichotomy between a 'fictional' text versus the 'real' world. Thus the basis of positions and oppositions as relating to some notion of objective "reality" is underlying the construction of Knowledge through interpretation and judgement in the practice of literary criticism. In the practice of literary criticism as a politics of interpretation, the struggle for an authoritative position which appeals to 'essence', 'nature', or 'reality' for the correct meanings to constitute knowledge, is criticised by deconstruction, or what has come to be known as poststructuralist feminism. Thus I believe that the important challenge for feminist literary criticism--in acknowledging the struggle within its own discourse between the essentialist, materialist and poststructuralist aspects--is to confront the construction of these positions within the institutionalised oppositions of the 'literary' versus the 'sociological'. This needs to be done in order to question the basis of power in the representation of knowledge as essentialist, particularly in the establishment of 'values' where critical judgement and authority is organised around a politics of 'real' experience and a politics of interpretation, with their underlying dependence upon stable meanings and a struggle for power between correct positions. As Mary Poovey states in her article "Feminism and

Deconstruction":

> We will need to turn from campaigns that reproduce the essentialism of sex difference to projects that call into question the very essentialism upon which our history has been based. In this sense, conceptualizing the issue in terms of real women is part of the solution, but it is also part of the problem. (Feminist Studies 63)

What this suggests for a practice of feminist literary criticism that is striving to avoid the politics of hierarchical institutions that have constructed the literary canon, is that essentialism must be avoided as a platform for the exercise of power through judgement strategies based on 'real' experience, and oppression has to be addressed as a set of interrelated competing interests for power that are produced within an intertextual field. As Moi says in Sexual/Textual Politics this is not to constitute women as 'against' power:

> But women's relationship to power is not exclusively one of victimization. Feminism is not simply about rejecting power, but about transforming the existing power structures--and, in the process, transforming the very concept of power itself. (Sexual/Textual 148)

Such a project would question the construction of a literary 'feminist' canon as well as the simple insertion of women's texts into the mainstream canonical structure. As Moi points out:

> If, as I have previously argued, all efforts towards a definition of 'woman' are destined to be essentialist, it looks as if feminist theory might thrive better if it abandoned the minefield of femininity and femaleness for a while and approached the questions of oppression and emancipation from a different direction. (148)

Thus the project of defining what is "female" within the work of women in order to judge them by a set of standards will merely replicate the essentialist positions of authority in the tradition of literary criticism as practiced within the (hu)man discourse. What may be more relevant is a nongendered approach to investigate the critique of oppression offered by representations in women's or men's texts with respect to their feminist dynamics, and then to

read how these critiques of form, style, or subject work counter-discursively within the context of reception and production in the intertextual field of discourse (discussed in Part 4).

As Wandor indicates in her introduction to Look Back in Gender, the study of the defects of traditional literary criticism is not limited to women:

> ... the received tradition of the theatre presents us with an imaginative world created and controlled by men. In the texts that have come down to us, this is a world of great imaginative power and it is this power in its complex manifestations which informs our approach to the theatre of our own time ... Feminist movements since the nineteenth century have challenged the traditionally subordinate roles of women in both society and the theatre, and in the most recent wave of feminist since 1969-70 and the development of the theatrical 'fringe' in the context of British subsidised theatre, many more challenges have been made to traditional male dominance in the theatre ... In this context, the function of gender means not just looking at female characters but at male characters too. This can only work if it demonstrates the critical ways in which maleness as well as femaleness work in the operation of the theatrical dynamic. (xiv)

Following along the lines of this point, Wandor has suggested that maleness as well as femaleness needs to be discussed for its textual and political connotations in drama, and Munich makes a similar point in "Notorious Signs, Feminist Criticism and Literary Tradition":

> For this reason alone it would be mistaken for feminists to polarize criticism according to the genitals of the author, or to attend only to women's writing. This reification of gender will retard the changes in reading that is [sic] one of feminist criticism's goals. (Making 251)

She also points out that the demands of the same critical tradition which excluded women's texts from canonical acceptance have also affected and limited the readings of texts that become part of the canon:

> Critical discourse has tended to be more misogynist than the texts it examines. Tagged with a patriarchal interpretation, canonical texts pass into the culture validated by what the Institution of Reading has understood ... Ideally a feminist

> critique would question not only the inadequate representation of other voices in the western literary canon but the inadequate explication of received tradition. The blindness of patriarchal criticism to female-authored works does not mean that its acuity to subjects it has called its own is thereby sharpened. On the contrary, the defensive strategies that males use to avoid what has become a main subject for feminist critics--the 'invisible' sexual politics of literature--have lamed their interpretation of the canon as well. To privilege certain forms as great, certain themes as important and certain genres as major has required traditional criticism to disregard or elide those very aspects in the 'great' texts that are incongruent with patriarchal gender definitions. (251-252)

As Cynthia Ward writes in her article on oral texts, "What They Told Buchi Emecheta", it is the limited interpretations of the standard tools of literary criticism which need to be deconstructed:

> Realist literary conventions such as unity, credibility, character development, and motivation have been--appropriately--called into question by readers who have found such prescriptive criteria constitutive of a normalizing, bourgeois white male subjectivity. It is no longer possible to consider such criticism value-neutral, and its relevance even to works that were consciously written according to such conventions is questionable. (emphasis mine; PMLA, January 1990, p 86)

This mode of analysis questions prescriptive criteria as they have privileged masculinist values, but the forms themselves are not gendered, such that the appearance of differing styles or representations can signify a critique but they need not signify either a male, female or feminist genre.

The 'Real' World

In examining the multiplicity of ideologies underlying 'knowledge' and the role of positions within criticism itself, the intersection of feminism and language is an exploration of the ways that language, although shared by all, is not gender-neutral, nor free of ideological value, nor is it shared equally as in the case where male dominance has appropriated language in specific ways that exclude the full participation of others--as in legal, medical,

scientific, or literary discourses. The role of language in representation and the intertextual construction of social values is described by Nelly Furman in her article, "The Politics of Language: Beyond the Gender Principle":

> Literary criticism is one of the places where feminism confronts patriarchal values. Feminist criticism unveils the prejudices at work in our appreciation of cultural artefacts, and shows us how the linguistic medium promotes and transmits the values woven through the fabric of our society. (Making 59)

In the work of examining the ways in which critical practices have worked in reviews to apply a set of values to women's writing, one of the necessary projects for feminist literary criticism, according to Humm in Feminist Criticism, has been to:

> reverse the situation where male critics talk about the syntactical defences and distortions of women writers, and identify instead the way male readings are themselves full of specific defences and distortions before we can provide correctives ... to demolish the whole argument of male criticism in which the perspective of a non-aligned male critic is assumed to be sexually neutral while a feminist is seen as a case of special pleading. (12).

Humm argues the need to "establish a feminist position in literary criticism very quickly because criticism is central to the hegemonic power of education, [so] why not just get on and write a feminist criticism?" (Feminist 12). However, a feminist theory which questions the hegemonic power of any institution would want to be very careful not to set itself up as another adjunct to theory as already practiced and, although Humm recognises this, she still says "it is male criticism, not feminism, which has the ideological blinkers" (Feminist 12). To displace the male critic as an invalid judge and replace it with a feminist judge does not question the underlying tradition of criticism itself. As Furman points out:

> Yet an unfortunate consequence of the critics' efforts towards a separate, but equally valid, literary tradition is that they leave unquestioned some of the prejudices which create the authority of tradition in the first place. Among those

> notions unchallenged are: universal human experience, and reflection of experience in literary representation. (63)

I have already argued that the (hu)man discourse and its gender biased standards do not represent human, nor universal, experience. To collect women's writing and argue that there is an historical tradition which has been excluded is one thing. However, to establish a female tradition which privileges women's experiences--that only women can write and interpret--would merely replicate the masculinist gender prejudices underlying a politics of experience in the (hu)man discourse. Further, the work of feminist criticism which assumes the text to be an unproblematic reflection of experience ignores the fact that representation is a construct rather than a simple reflection. It thus remains within a practice of interpretation and the determination of 'meaning' based on a politics of 'real' experience reflected in literature:

> For Gilbert and Gubar, as for Showalter, there is no doubt that literature reflects life and that experience of life is translated into literature (63) ... While the egalitarian argument in feminist criticism calls for equal representation in literature of women's and men's experience of life, poststructuralist feminism denounces representation itself as already a patriarchal paradigm. (59) ... <u>What is taken for granted in the study of images and their relation to experience is that the 'picturing' of experience is gender-neutral or free of ideological values</u>. (emphasis mine; 67)

Although she points out that a female egalitarian tradition does not question the prejudices which construct tradition, she nevertheless accuses poststructuralist feminism as "denouncing" representation as patriarchal. It would be more accurate to argue that representation has been controlled by a patriarchal discourse to constitute and reproduce its own power: but there is no essence in representation that poststructuralism would categorise as "patriarchal" in the first instance.

More important than the gender of representation is that representational art is caught up in the age-old ideology of

art imitates nature, where in the name of Art, poetic imitation forgets that it is fictionalising 'nature'. As Monteith points out:

> One of the immense positive gains accruing from feminist criticism has been the realisation that the female in literature is a literary construct. That may seem a very obvious statement. Didn't we always know that everything in literature is constructed? At one level, yes. But the act of construction didn't seem to matter very much as long as it was considered in terms of craftsmanship. (emphasis mine; 1)

A stake in the notion of experience reflected in art is the concept of the text and the world as separate; one essentially 'real' and one 'fictional'--instead of both as interrelated aspects within ideological construction and interpretation. In Woman as Writer Lorna Sage refers to this reflection myth as one that has reinforced traditional gender ideologies, but also points out the possibilities of writing to challenge them:

> This notion of the 'world' on the page is an enduring critical myth that feminist thinking has again and again (and rightly) called into question. It is also, however, the reflex of a practical hope--that writing can test out and change the parameters of freedom. (15)

However, "testing out the parameters of freedom" can end up being a struggle between realism and 'imaginative' writing, often interpreted as 'alternative' and judged harshly against more important 'serious' writing about the 'real' world. The dichotomy between 'serious' and 'alternative' is often centered around the notion of real versus artificial, and Sawchuk argues that the postmodern challenge to what is 'natural' in the referent as the so-called real background, deconstructs the very notion of a real world through the process of mixed signs:

> Some aspects of feminist thought, which criticize fashion on the basis of its 'misrepresentation' of women, and advocate a return to the 'natural' body, and 'natural' beauty have also had to be abandoned ... The present era, the age of the postmodern, marks a collapsing of the space of these borders. Reality, the referent, is called into question at that junction where artificial

> signs are intertextually mixed with 'real elements'. (emphasis mine; Tale 60)

The difference between the real and the artificial is embedded within the question of definition for feminist literary criticism which Humm poses as the problem between the literary and the sociological:

> Is it to document women's social oppression and, therefore, methodologically, slip towards the social sciences (in literary terms realism); or should it train women linguistically for a transformation of language? (emphasis mine; Feminist Criticism 45)

Because Humm is subscribing to the separation of the "real" world and the "fictional" page, she maintains the opposition between the "literary" and the "sociological" and thus judges the materialist approaches in feminism as "slipping" towards realism and the social sciences and, presumably, away from language and literature. As I have argued earlier, this dichotomy between literary and sociological falls away when there is no privileging of the real over the literary because they are both seen as constructs within the field of representation. In this sense, the world is not on the page, but instead the world is also like a page, and social practices can be thus be read as constructed texts which intersect with the literary.

Within the concept of intertextuality, Moi suggests that textual analysis can be more productive when looking at the whole text in the social field and not just a fragment of writing:

> The only way of producing interesting results from such texts is to take the whole of the utterance (the whole text) as one's object, which means studying its ideological, political and psychoanalytic articulations, its relations with society, with the psyche and--not least--with other texts. Indeed, Kristeva has coined the concept of intertextuality to indicate how one or more systems of signs are transposed into others. (156)

It is this multiplicity of significations, as Volosinov writes, which indicates that "differently oriented accents intersect in every ideological sign", and thus within the intertextual field of the same language the sign functions

like "an arena of struggle" (qtd. in Moi 157):

> This point is crucial to a non-essentialist feminist analysis of language. It posits that we all use the same language but that we have different interests--and interests must here be taken to mean political and power-related interests which intersect the sign. The meaning of the sign is thrown open--the sign becomes 'polysemic' rather than 'univocal'--and though it is true to say that the dominant power group at any given time will dominate the intertextual production of meaning, this is not to suggest that the opposition has been reduced to total silence. The power struggle intersects in the sign. (158)

However, intertextuality does not only refer to 'literature' as Furman describes it, but also refers to the world as a web of written and other signs. Monteith refers to this aspect of intertextuality as the encoding of social values:

> Intertextuality is a concept which seems particularly important and relevant to women at the moment, both as writers and as critics...I believe that social values encoded in the text at the time of writing are also part of its intertextuality and those specifically applying to gender differences are particularly relevant to the feminist critic. (emphasis mine; 5)

While the concept of intertextuality incorporates the possibility of uncovering cultural values, it is not a 'method' of analysis that is reduced to the written text, as if the 'meaning' of social values were "encoded" in a fixed way within the literary text but rather how they as representations interact with the field of discourse through reception, interpretation, and production, which of course changes as cultural perceptions of social codes change. Thus intertextual analysis points to the ongoing critique of meaning in the field of discourse.

For example, June Howard discusses the equality debate based on different and equal, or similar and equal, arguing that a third theoretical position exists which she says is advocated by Kristeva and prefigured by Virginia Woolf (187):

> the very dichotomy man/woman as an opposition between two rival entities may be understood as belonging to metaphysics. What can 'identity', even 'sexual identity', mean in a new theoretical and scientific space where the very notion of

> identity is challenged? (Kristeva qtd. in Howard 187)

As identity includes some biological "essence" but is largely a social construction, there is no reason to demand equality based on the natural sameness or natural difference of men and women. The poststructuralist challenge is rather that there is no concept of absolute identity as 'natural opposites', reflecting some innate thing that is a self-evident basis for power organised around sex, race or class--it merely argues that identity is a process of subjective and intertextual constructions. Some feel that the deconstructionist project which argues against any natural essence that could prescribe a unified identity for woman, seems to eliminate a political position that is organised around being female. However, as Poovey suggests in "Feminism and Deconstruction" it means organising around more than being female:

> We need to recognize that 'woman' is currently both a position within a dominant, binary symbolic order and that that position is arbitrarily (and falsely) unified ... The multiple positions real women occupy--the positions dictated by race, for example, or by class or sexual preference--should alert us to the inadequacy of binary logic and unitary selves without making us forget that that this logic has dictated (and still does) some aspects of women's social treatment ... For, if the position 'woman' is falsely unified and if one's identity is not given (solely or necessarily) by anatomy, then woman--or even women--cannot remain a legitimate rallying point for political actions ... Real historical women have been (and are) oppressed, and the ways and means of that oppression need to be analyzed and fought. But at the same time, we need to be ready to abandon the binary thinking that has stabilized women as a group that could be collectively (although not uniformly) oppressed. (Feminist Studies 62)

The expansion beyond binary thinking and falsely unified positions does not eliminate the project to analyse and dismantle structural oppression as it affects females, but rather suggests the necessity of a broader understanding of ideology and positions. In this sense instead of a reductionist, unified political position only based on being

female, there is a more complex analysis of the multiple and interrelated ideologies of economics, race, or cultural politics that are involved in the reproduction of social constructions of power.

(Op)positions

Poststructuralist theories have argued that essentialist criticism practiced as interpretation within a politics of experience has resulted in the construction of knowledge and, therefore, 'positions' of power, according to the values of those with access to 'knowledge' and the authority of critical decision-making. The resistance to the challenges to essentialism offered by intertextuality and the deconstruction of the 'real' are often due to simplified understandings of these concepts, but might also relate to the difficulty of relinquishing the power to dominate and control the textual field from the organisational platform of falsely unified, essentially 'real' and 'oppositional' positions.

In Men and Feminism, Smith wrote that only a woman could speak with authority about women's texts, thus revealing a basis of criticism as a politics of experience, but he also implies the need for a secure, correct position, as Heath says:

> Part of the difficulty is to do with 'correctness', the problem men, we, can have, again, of protecting--of self-protecting--position. I want to be somewhere securely. Thinking through feminist theory, Paul says he feels 'that it's impossible to say anything properly correct'. (qtd. in Heath 44)

However, the secure position fortressed with 'clear' meanings justifies the exertion of power over others perceived as 'wrong', which is often a case of judgement based more on what is unknown about the 'other'. Heath refers to men needing to have a "position" as a "stand" within feminism:

> I do not want to say that 'where am I?' is a male question but I do think that men want very much to know where they are vis-à-vis feminism, that feminism can quickly be produced by them as a matter of their place (and so of its), and as a

> theoretical matter, especially in a context like this, this MLA session, where we can too easily make feminism an approach, which then gives us an approach, a handy object, some thing we can place ourselves in relation to, 'feminist theory' as topic (exactly, our topos)--where can I stand? (Men 42-43)

Perhaps Heath is arguing that men would rather deal theoretically--more securely--with feminism as a mapped out sort of abstract approach instead of taking it into themselves to consider their own constructions of masculinity and power, but this is still a self-indulgent excuse and a separatist approach that will no doubt keep feminism as the unknown other. The fear of acknowledging the common ground instead of righteously fighting from opposite corners is more likely a reflection of the inability to relinquish power gained by dominant positions within a traditional politics of interpretation.

In A World of Difference, Johnson discusses some of the misconceptions about deconstruction which she relates to a resistance to uncertainty, and a dependence upon the traditional polarised oppositions in the practice of interpretive criticism. She writes that radicals see in deconstruction "a conservative plot to talk literary critics out of participating in social change while conservatives see in it a nihilistic desire to cancel out human meaning altogether" (6). Johnson argues that there is strong resistance to the idea that "language cannot itself be entirely reduced to interpretability", and this resistance is "always absolutized into nihilism or quietism" (6). This is because without the familiar oppositions within which to anchor firm interpretations of meaning and consequently secure positions, it is seen as the death of all meaning, all discourse, and all positions. Johnson then shows that several arguments against deconstruction reveal themselves to be immersed in the simple logic of binary opposition. For example, several criticisms argue as follows:

> In the absence of any appeal to a coercive reality to which the plurality of subjectivities can be referred, all perspectives become equally valid.

> Certainty and piety of all kinds are systematically undermined in favor of a universal relativism of values and judgment. Just as the revisionists are led to reduce the act of criticism to a given critic's subjective preference, so do professors relegate judgment of all sorts to the students' subjective preferences.
>
> In revisionist criticism the first consequence of calling discourse itself into question is the proposition that all criticism amounts to misreading, and thus one reading is as legitimate as another.
>
> But if all interpretation is misinterpretation, and if all criticism (like all history) of texts can engage only with a critic's own misconstruction, why bother to carry on the activities of interpretation and criticism? (qtd. in Johnson 12)

Johnson points out that the logic of such statements can be examined for their own reductionism:

> 1. If all readings are misreadings, then all reading are equally valid.
> 2. If there is no such thing as an objective reading, then all readings are based on subjective preferences.
> 3. If there is no absolute truth, then everything is relative. (12)

Such statements represent the common misunderstanding and fear that if everything is relative, then one cannot say anything, or if there is no objective absolute reality, then there is no meaning and everything lapses into nihilism.

As Morris argues, these fixed opposites were never there as 'real' in the first place, and meaning has always been a process of constructing reality through the field of interpretations. Morris interprets Baudrillard's essays in Simulations as bemoaning a lost reality, arguing that it is actually the lost oppositions and noble dichotomies at the heart of the problem since they have been part of defining the difference between reality and the imaginary (Pirate's 196):

> This is one difference between a system of 'meaning', in Baudrillard's terms, and a system of simulation; the former depends on solid oppositions, which in the latter are 'short-circuited by the confusing of poles, in a total circularity of signalling'. The curious clarity here is not that this logic then requires us to

> declare the death of meaning, but that it first requires us to consent that meaning was really 'that'--and only that ... At stake here is not only another addition to the appalling powers of goo, but a positive notion of 'existence' as the way things used to be--according to a system of noble dichotomies. And when that system becomes unstable (like the 'unstable equation of lines, dots, frames and pulses' in the video image), then things are as good as (but worse than) dead. Reality can only exist, be positively itself, be 'real', if it is different from and opposed to the imaginary. So it is with sex and work, history and nature, desire and power: if a 'savage opposition' between them is dissolved then they are, in an absolute sense, no longer with us.... (196-197)

In fact, the liberation from 'Absolute Truth' and the 'one correct position' determined between "savage oppositions" leaves the field open to constant assessments of the production of meaning and social structures for their effects, seeing these not as the inevitable results of a 'natural' system of power but as constructed and therefore offering the possibility of social changes in the distribution of power.

Perhaps it is this very possibility of change from a fixed order and power structure--resulting from the absence of an absolute reality platform from which to rule--that has the essentialists nostalgic for their secure (op)positions. In their article "The Nostalgia for Law and Order and the Policing of Knowledge", Donald Morton and Mas'ud Zavarzadeh discuss a review (referred to as "Yuppies") of Catherine Belsey's Critical Practice, saying that:

> 'Yuppies'' understanding of its tutor text and of deconstruction is philosphically highly problematic, since it naively declares that Belsey 'clearly presents' (p. 12) deconstructive thought. It is rudimentary that deconstruction contests the very possibility not only of 'summary', but also of 'clarity', and 'representation', arguing that by maintaining the illusion of 'clear representation', Western logocentrism has set up hierarchies which enable it to regard language as a transparent medium for communication between sovereign subjects who are assumed to have access to some transdiscursive knowledge--presence. (26)

The deconstructive critique undermines the foundational

categories of the practice of interpretation such as the subject/object split, the unified conscious subject, the concept of reality as organised around empirical knowledge, the dominance of meaning and indeed the authority of knowledge itself as the organiser of positions of power. The effect of destabilised knowledge upon such positions may in fact represent the greatest area of resistance:

> 'Yuppies'' representation of the world as a lawful, rule-governed, and authoritative check on our conception of 'reality' is reinforced by the theory of knowledge to which it adheres: empiricism as the mode of knowing the world. In the name of empiricism, 'Yuppies' rejects the postmodern view that data is always already an interpretation situated in ideology, for fear that such a view destabilizes 'knowledge' and threatens not only its authority but Authority itself. (33)

Morton and Zavarzadeh point out that the rise of empiricism as a theory of knowledge grew out of the period of "rising mercantilism when prospering merchants were seeking an equal footing with king and church, or at least freedom from exploitation" (Bruner qtd. in "Nostalgia" 33). Thus they argue that the politics of empiricism relate to the ideology of a particular class:

> Empiricism, in other words, is the scientific and philosophical ideology of a rising class--a class that is attempting to dislodge the 'authority' of Divine Rights and Divine Revelation by postulating Nature itself as the source of knowledge and that furthermore theorizes that access to Nature is direct, free, and open to all. Having by our own time succeeded in obtaining power, however, the bourgeoisie is attempting to maintain that power by transferring 'authority' from Divine Right to Nature so that Nature in itself becomes the source of uncontestable knowledge, indeed replacing Divine Revelation. Freedom for one class then becomes suppression of others, and it is this suppressive, authoritarian aspect of empiricism that is institutionalized in various forms of modern positivism. 'Yuppies' puts forth this view of knowledge as the only 'scientific' form of knowing and in doing so offers a theory of science which is, as we have argued before, suitable for the petty-bourgeoisie today and highly useful to the conservative agenda. (33)

The politics of interpretation determines meaning by following the same agenda as empirical knowledge, such that

the authority of critical judgement is based on the privileged experience of some which results in the suppression of the texts of others. Thus when the 'knowledge' of some people is used to impose authority upon others, it becomes a crude power tactic that displaces the valuable experiences and cultural systems of others considered devoid of correct 'knowledge' by the well-positioned authorities who dominate and homogenise the textual field.

It could well be that the moving away from a politics of interpretation may signal a shift beyond the concern to produce 'fixed' or 'correct' positions of reference, since any position to some extent is always plural and relative in time and space. As Spivak intimates, the fixed stand negates this plurality:

> A better formulation of this is to be found in Pierre Macherey: 'we always eventually find, at the edge of the text, the language of ideology, momentarily hidden, but eloquent by its very absence'. Let us consider moments on the edges or borders ... Such a gesture will yield a hint of their politics as well, a politics of the freely choosing subject who, devising his (sic) own plurality, breaks this theory as he takes a stand. (In Other Worlds 122)

Yet if the notion of a unified 'stand' from which 'objectively to observe' a text through an oppositional politics of interpretation is no longer accurate, then the traditional technique of using an ideological position as a judgement platform for literary criticism may need revision as Wayne Booth suggests:

> The sense of ideology as free choice is the goal: 'the question we now face, then, as believers in feminist (or any other) ideology, is this: am I free, in interpreting and criticizing a work of art, to employ that ideology as one element in my appraisal of the artistic value of that work?' (qtd. in Spivak, In Other Worlds 122)

The deployment of ideological positions "objectively" to judge the "artistic value" of the work as essentially good or bad becomes a very problematic situation, and has everything to do with production or nonproduction in the field.

Obviously there is nothing intrinsically 'wrong' with assuming a stand as a position of reference, as long as the critic takes on board her/his subjectivity, cultural relativity, historicity and ideological plurality as a participant with the text and not as separate from it. It is not that one cannot make judgements, nor take positions and organise as part of the process of informed dialogue, as long as these judgements do not deny the imagination or experience of others. Yet the problem of secure or correct positions often ends up as a separatist struggle for dominance rather than as a co-operative critique of the ideological construction of power differentials in the intertextual field of discourse.

Section (D). Defin(d)ing Feminist Drama and the Anti-Canon

As oppressive social conditions and absences set the stage for the emergence of feminism and feminist literary criticism, the scarcity of women in the mainstream drama discourse produced the response from feminist writers of creating another genre known as feminist theatre, in addition to the ongoing work of recuperating the lost texts of women playwrights. In this section I will discuss the historical emergings of what has come to be known as feminist drama, as well as some of the limitations of defining a genre that some women playwrights themselves resist. In reading deconstructively through the project to define a feminist drama, I will compare various strategies with practices of the (hu)man discourse and feminist literary criticism; in particular, the establishment of a tradition of female writing, using Case's discussion of a "new poetics" to work through the opposition between the essentialist and materialist project in defining a feminist drama. I will conclude by discussing the implications of defin(d)ing feminist drama as a prescriptive project that can lead to an alternative feminist canon which then mimics erasure by excluding women who seemingly do not conform (according to the prescriptive standards and subjective interpretations of the feminist critics).

I will argue throughout that it is more useful to develop a nongendered and a nonprescriptive analysis of plays by women as texts operating in the intertextual field of discourse, so that their work is not imposed upon by critical judgements based on the same traditional assumptions and erasure practices of the (hu)man discourse, only with a mirror reversal that privileges the female gender. There is often a different style of theatre/performance in the plays of women that is less hampered by dramatic traditions in the form, and by dominant gender definitions in the represented subjects, but I would not attribute this style as belonging to the essence or nature of being female. It does relate to the cultural construction of gender, but gender construction

is not limited to women and I do not believe that one must be female to write "difference" in style or form. The subjects of women may arise out of personal experience of course, (though the play is still a textual construct and not a simple reflection of 'reality') which differs from those of males (remembering that some men are raped, and economically or racially oppressed). Still, to limit the representation of gender oppression and other feminist issues to women writers only is engaged in a politics of interpretation based on the authority of 'real' experience which would deny the imagination of males to write on the gender oppression of women (and men), just as the (hu)man discourse denied women the authority to write about the public realm.

Herstory and Early Roots

Liz Natalle notes in her book Feminist Theatre: A Study in Persuasion that early feminist groups concluded that a feminist drama didn't exist, so they proceeded to write it. Helene Keyssar discusses the "roots and contexts" of feminist playwrights in America in her book Feminist Theatre where she states that feminist drama emerged in America in the late 1950s-1960s, "parented by the women's movement and the 'new theatre'" (1), and that whether or not women playwrights identified themselves "publicly or politically as 'feminists'" at this time, playwrights existed whose "'art is related to their condition as women'" (Honor Moore qtd. in Keyssar 1). However, these observations of lack by feminist writers in the 60s reflect the historical erasure of earlier women playwrights' representations and critical arguments. As I have shown in Part One, there have been many women playwrights prior to and after the period of the suffragettes, who also discussed their condition as women, but the feminist theatre emerging from the 60s was more visibly related to the social context of the women's movement, and thus took on the name of feminist theatre. It is my observation that what is now called feminist theatre (i.e. that produced from the late 1950s to the present) is the reappearance of similar key subjects in earlier plays by

women which also engaged in critiques of the dominant representations of gender and other social constructions. While it may be tempting to say that the contemporary work by women is more radical in its critique of representation, there are striking examples of avant-garde writing style, innovative theatrical techniques, and shocking imagery of violation to women even as early as the first known woman playwright, Hrosvita the nun. Thus, a problem with the name of "feminist" theatre is a denial of its own historicity, in that the term 'feminist' is time defined from the late 1950s onwards as an emergent social movement--as if what came before was not like feminism.

In Olauson's historical examination of American women playwrights and criticism, she argues that while the suffragette plays were more overtly political in their focus on the right to legislate and vote for government, the main emphasis in women's texts from the 30s to the 50s was on a woman's individual conflict with conventional gender roles. She says that, in the 60s, the focus became a 'feminist' questioning of political systems and a dissatisfaction with the effect of social institutions upon the individual, associated with feminism as a social movement (140-69). Yet representations throughout that earlier period including plays such as Machinal, Can You Hear Their Voices, The Old Maid, The Torrents, Aria de Capo or Trifles very directly confronted social, political and business institutions as they impinged on women, men and children, as family and workers. In addition, prior to the radical style of the 60s, women playwrights were experimenting with dramatic form in the expressionistic plays of the 20s and 30s, as well as in the 'new drama' of the 40s and 50s in critiques that questioned 'realistic' representations of reality. Rachel Frances says in her introduction to A Century of Plays by American Women that:

> Women were major contributors to the dramatic activity of the 1930s. Their plays are neglected today for the same reason that so much of the drama of that period is; they bear the label of 'politically subversive'. (20)

These early plays perhaps were regarded as subversive but, whatever the reason, they were criticised as trivial and domestic or just simply ignored. As Wandor states, it is worth remembering the degree of challenge represented in a play "when one tries to work out why some plays become commercially successful while others don't--and in part this is likely to stem from the nature of the feminist message contained in the play" (6). It is perhaps the way that the feminist message was represented which changed from the first wave of feminism to the second wave of the 60s, as a strategic writing response to gain acceptance for plays in what, for women, was a hostile critical environment. Lynda Hart's introduction to Making A Spectacle points out that since drama is "more public and social" than other literary arts, "the woman playwright's voice reaches a community of spectators in a public place that historically has been regarded as a highly subversive, politicized environment" (2). She discusses the meaning of spectacle in theatre and "the power inherent in this collective confrontation [which] challenges the very structures of 'reality' that have kept women behind the scenes" (2). Hart argues that, since the theatre is most removed from the domestic sphere, the woman playwright takes a greater risk than the novelist, but it also offers "her greater potential for effecting social change" (2). It is likely that this risk and/or greater potential is because of the public nature of theatre, and its more immediate confrontation with audiences and critics, where the media reviews given to plays are very often a vital necessity for their successful performance runs, and eventual publication. There may have been greater difficulties for women playwrights in sustaining their work on stage if it contradicted dominant social power structures. The closer their work was to political challenge, the more vulnerable it was to critical marginalisation; hence strategies of writing and production became crucial to achieve the widest audience and the most positive representation.

This then may account for Olauson's perception that all

women writing plays from the 30s to the 50s did not seem overtly political, but represented issues which she argues challenged the difficulties of their personal gender roles. What may have changed was not the politics--but the writing strategies from a more overt style of direct political confrontation to the more indirect personal representations. And since modern feminism has argued that the personal is the political, it can be said that most of the plays by women from the Suffragettes through to the 50s were also engaged with feminist concerns regarding gender and social structures, though in differing historical contexts from the modern plays which are now seen as the birth of feminist theatre. Generally speaking then, the emergence of 'feminist theatre' as somehow a 'new' genre reflects the lack of awareness about previous writing by women playwrights, their topics, and their spectacles, and is an effect of historical erasure which produces the syndrome of women playwrights having endlessly to reinvent the wheel. Other consequences include a lack of access to arguments posited over time which form the continuity in a discourse and, as Virginia Woolf argues in A Room of One's Own, provide the basis for 'masterpieces' which are not the exclusive property of an individual genius, but reflect the intertextuality of a collective reading and thinking process over time.

Finding

Erasure has made it difficult to find and read plays by women due to the problems of production, publication and distribution, but the difficulty of locating their names has been reduced by feminist researchers who have practised for some time a strategy of textual recuperation of women authors, though the problem of finding the texts in print still remains. Although a few scholarly books about plays by women have appeared in the last few years, the surface has yet to be scratched. Women playwrights remain in relative obscurity, with the same production problems they have suffered in the past. Keyssar's Feminist Theatre has an extensive bibliography, providing a good start on recent work

from the 50s onwards. The publication of Women in American Theatre by Helen Krich Chinoy and Linda Walsh Jenkins was a landmark, their appended Sourcebook listing many women playwrights from the 1900s onwards, as well as theatre groups, awards, and sources of publication including periodicals and reviews. Leavitt has provided an extensive discussion of women's collective drama work in Feminist Theatre Groups. Rachel France, editor of A Century of Plays by Women, offers a wide range of many older plays, as well as a supplementary reading list of playwrights from 1900 to 1950. Rosamund Gilder's book Enter the Actress documented Hrosvita of Gandersheim, a 10th century nun, as the first woman playwright in the 30s and, though her plays were translated in 1920 by Christopher St. John who wrote How the Vote was Won, Hrosvita still remained an unanthologised unknown. Her work has since received some attention from feminist scholars such as Karen Malpede in Women in Theatre and Sue-Ellen Case in Feminism and Theatre.

Wandor's work in Understudies: Sexual Politics and Theatre offers a useful historical perspective on feminist theatre from its emergence as such in Britain in 1969. She feels that there were general phases to the work by women in theatre, both as groups and individual playwrights, such that one group may have moved from a more overtly political agitprop style to more personal dramatic work, while other groups did the reverse. In Understudies Wandor offers a description of these phases in feminist theatre based on dominant styles and themes, and it is interesting that she identifies phases in modern feminist theatre similar to earlier play-writing strategies put forward by Olauson. That is, a movement from overtly political issues to a focus on more individual characters, along with a questioning of representation in dramatic forms. I will quote the brief summary of Understudies from her article "The Fifth Column: Feminism and Theatre:"

> 1. 1970-1973: Collectivist, libertarian, issue-based agitprop. Mainly street theatre, taking its content from the early vigour of feminist analysis

> of passivity, femininity, women's oppression in the family. Vivid and larger-than-life visual imagery, short on words. Followed by indoor agitprop, which mixed naturalistic 'telling it like it is' scenes with music, songs, cartoon symbols for capitalism. Theatre used as a consciousness-raiser, often followed by discussion. Very much of its time in rejecting writers and directors as part of the oppressive hierarchy of convential theatre.
> 2. 1974-1979: Professional companies beginning to form--the best known of which are the Women's Theatre Group (1974), Monstrous Regiment (1975-6) and Gay Sweatshop (1976). Feminism slowly beginning to have an impace on women working in the professional theatre; the impact ranging from women who saw the new developments as a chance for more work, to those for whom it was a chance to think about feminism in general, and the need for women to produce challenging work. The groups helping to generate women writers, since they were no longer content only to devise and write collectively. In keeping with socialist theatre in general, a tendency to move away from issue-based agitprop, to wanting radical 'plays', with more concern for the subtleties of individual character. Social realism the dominant form.
> 3. From 1979 two chief developments, both indicative of the direct and indirect impact of feminism on younger women working in theatre for the first time; new young writers and directors, who mostly see themselves as in some way 'post-feminist'--i.e., they have a less militant attitude to feminism, but have the confidence to choose to work in theatre, which they might not have done a decade before. Secondly, a theatrical initiative from women performers which is quite different from the early agitprop work. These were/are groups who directly challenge the conventional stage representation of the female performer. For them stage presence has become robust, physical, witty, working through visual imagery as much as through words (the latter usually less important). (Drama 5)

As Wandor surveys the spectrum in alternative theatre, she finds "an interesting development" that moved from the vivid imagery of early street theatre to a theatre of argument which explored "what it would mean to reclaim the experience of women and gays ... reversing the conventional priorities of male heterosexual experience and also altering its class perspective" (Understudies 49). What she calls the third phase shows a return to some of the "early spontaneity" but

in a different context:

> instead of using dressing-up and visual imagery to challenge the audience's assumptions about real-life oppresion, the new spontaneity revolved around an examination of the way the theatrical forms themselves work to represent sexuality ... The new work takes over and subverts entertainment forms which already exist. (emphasis mine; 49)

As I have shown, most of the negative criticisms relate to the problematic "structures" of women playwrights, usually basing this on an essential lack of logic. I agree that this experimentation with form in art is more likely a precursor to a poststructuralist critique of structural differences which can develop into a nongendered and nonprescriptive analysis of drama that I will discuss later in this chapter and in Part Four (B). However, Wandor goes on to say that this new work "opens up the possibility of an original female performance style" (49). I would have to argue that this is still an appeal for some essentially female-only mode, a mere reversal of masculine essentialism. The next stage to pinning down a 'female' performance style is defining the characteristics of such a 'feminine' or 'feminist' work to apply in the construction of a tradition and a canon. The gender essentialism that defines a female tradition or style within feminist literary criticism thus affects feminist drama because it applies similar limitations in defining what is feminist as located only in the play, and as relating to the experience of being female, rather than about representations of gender and oppression and how they work beyond the play within the intertextual field of discourse.

Defin(d)ing

In Feminist Theatre Groups, Leavitt points out that there are basically two types of feminist theatre, the conservative and the radical. The conservative feminists seek reform within the traditional social structures and are interested in obtaining more work opportunities for women in theatre. However, British director Pam Brighton points out in her article "Directions", that the problem with "visibility" and "advances for women" within traditional,

mainstream theatre is one of compromise and even seduction by the institutionalised theatre; which operates as a product in a marketplace, with a hierarchical system of funding by vested interests, in a gender-biased realm of critical reception:

> The established theatre seems to me to pander more than ever to the social malaise, a circus specializing in trivializing human experience and potential. Each production becoming even more clearly a watershed in the career of its director climbing on the ladder to the top. I'm not sure women's theatre is the answer. Pack of Women, which I did shortly after coming back to England, taught me that when women have committed themselves to becoming objects of commerce and adulation they can behave just as badly as men in the same situation, perhaps worse, cloudy as the issues can become under the mystique of sisterhood. So perhaps it's my class that keeps me from pining for the whorehouse. When I read articles by women clamouring for representation inside the National and the RSC, I grimace. I have no intention of resuscitating those bastions of privilege. The future of the theatre lies, like the future of the country, in creating entirely fresh ways of examining ourselves and our potential for living together, of reviving and reconstituting whatever is left of our abilities to combine rather than to compete. (emphasis mine; Women and Theatre 60-61)

Brighton questions the establishment of a woman's tradition as an egalitarian approach that creates two separate traditions. Leavitt suggests that the radical aspect of the movement seeks a "fundamental change in the social system" rather than to "strive for individual or group success according to most established criteria" (94). She observes that like feminist groups, women's theatre groups also "support women and foster sisterhood" (94):

> The women's movement is concerned with exposing female myths, shattering female stereotypes and providing role models for women. Likewise feminist theatre seeks to discover what a woman is and could be, values the woman's experience, creates accurate characterizations and establishes a woman's tradition through a rediscovery and reappraisal of women's history. (94)

Here we see the impetus to displace the construction of femininity as defined by the (hu)man discourse through

different gender representations. However, "role models" can lead to the prescriptive project that women must have characters who do certain things or they are not dealing correctly with feminist issues concerning gender. This definitional style is evident in Janet Brown's Feminist Drama: Definition and Critical Analysis where a play is considered feminist when "a woman's struggle for autonomy is the central rhetorical motive" (1).

Leavitt writes that feminist theatre is interested in "presenting truthful images of women and the woman's experience through a growing body of drama that specifically focuses on women" (99). However, plays by women are still only representations of women, and the text is not a simple reflection of life but a construction where "truthful" is a relative term. It is perhaps more relevant to say that the work focuses more on women, questioning the way women have been represented and the social context within which they are embedded, while also reconstructing different images of women. Shotlander writes in an interview that all her work must be relevant to women:

> One nonfeminist woman said, after hearing about my projects, "But they're all about women. You're capable of writing something universal." I told her I'd just seen a very "universal" film on TV all about men, soldiers in World War II killing each other. (Belles Lettres 5)

Plays by women have focused a great deal on female experiences and perspectives with certain popular topics such as mother-daughter relationships, women's history plays, "rape, women in prison, women and madness, aging women, male/female relationships, social problems of daycare, unemployment, problems of welfare and urban renewal, and lesbianism" (Leavitt 96). In addition, the domestic or the trivial receive special attention:

> Commonplace activities and images, prevalent in visual art by women, are frequently represented in feminist drama, sometimes in an effort to point out the value of acts ordinarily perceived as trivial, sometimes to point out the terrible waste involved in them. (96)

While Leavitt says that most feminist theatre deals with the

oppression of a woman or a group of women, and usually show protagonists discovering a different awareness, they "do not show how the newly aware characters will function in a still sexist world" (95). Perhaps the questioning may be a significant part of the answer:

> When people see a struggle without an answer, they get upset because they want a positive answer. I think a positive answer exists in a clearly posed question. A solution which is too simple for a complex situation is not believable and gives the audience a false sense of knowing what to do. (Deborah Fortson qtd. in Leavitt 95)

Though some of the difficulty for women playwrights may be that the "solutions are too complex" (95), it may also signal the unrepresentability of equality within a sexist and hierarchical power structure.

Like Keyssar, Wandor and Case, Leavitt considers that feminist theatre exhibits a "desire to merge its ethics with its aesthetics" (94) in the attempt to locate and define a feminist style. Yet although every kind of style is utilised in plays by women or feminist theatre, she concludes that:

> It is too soon to identify an original form in feminist drama precisely because women are still experimenting with and searching for forms that appeal to them. (99)

However, one dominant characteristic in structure is the short form or one-act play but rather than regarding the prevalence of this as indicating a lack of dramaturgical skill, Leavitt argues that the one-act form was strategically suitable for the work being done. In an interview with Megan Terry, she argues that many pieces were written for gatherings where a long play would be unsuitable:

> A lot of them were written to be done at rallies where you have to do something quick and incisive to stir up the audience. There was not time to sit and contemplate things for three hours. The one-act form is marvelous. I love short stories, and the one-act is like a short story and like films. (Women in American Theatre 291)

Leavitt offers several playwright's comments with Terry saying that she wants "to say it, get it over with and go on to the next thing"; Lamb indicated that "shorter plays are

easier to get produced and that her intense, compact, direct style is suited to her material"; while Wandor believes that "the expressionistic element, when present, is often more effective in the one act form" (qtd. in Leavitt 97-99).

As much of the work is described as "plotless, circular, layered, poetic, choral, lyric, primal, ritual-like, multi-climactic, surreal, mosaic, collage-like, and non-realistic" (98), Leavitt concludes that overall, feminist drama has rejected traditional 'male' forms built on a hierarchical dramatic structure and points to the debate on whether or not a feminist aesthetic exists. Despite using alternative forms, many feminist playwrights reject the "formulation of an aesthetic because of implicit restrictions that would be disastrous to an emerging art form" (104). One example would be Liz Natalle's Feminist Theatre: A Study in Persuasion where the feminist play must contain a rhetoric of persuasion towards feminist beliefs. While some feminist playwrights may use nonrepresentational techniques to disrupt audience complacency and even dependency upon the traditional gender assumptions embedded within so-called realism, they nevertheless may still wish to resist the categorisation or demand for a particular style, as playwright Sandra Shotlander points out:

> I try to reach audiences with identifiable emotion, but I sometimes wish that Australian audiences and even feminist audiences would be more open to works that require thought. I don't think we should make any rules about representation or nonrealistic style. However, the style the playwright chooses is part of the statement. (Belles Lettres 5)

The other side of the coin relates to the development of a different culture:

> Martha Boesing believes that if women are going to develop a counterculture that is literally not any part of our culture (because the whole culture is male) 'then you have got to have people who say, "that is feminist and that's not"'. (104-105)

The fallacy here is the belief that the whole culture is male, and therefore there must be a new culture created that is female. Not only is this a position that biologically

homogenises males and females, but it also denies the participation of women in the creating of the current culture. The impetus behind the urge to define what "is feminist and what is not" does not have to be a prescriptive aesthetic relating to women only. It can be stated in a nongendered way as the project of experiencing plays (by women or men) as a representation of cultural textual constructs, which in a variety of ways can work to reinforce or question traditional assumptions and belief systems concerning gender and related socioeconomic social structures.

In Case's Feminism and Theatre there is a tension between the essentialist and materialist positions, only as applied to the discussion of feminist theatre and the struggle for new definitions. Case offers an analysis of form and suggests that different forms can deconstruct the tradition of Aristotelian drama:

> New feminist theory would abandon the traditional patriarchal values embedded in prior notions of form, practice and audience response in order to construct new critical models and methodologies for the drama that would accommodate the presence of women in the art, support their liberation from the cultural fictions of the female gender and deconstruct the valorisation of the male gender ... This 'new poetics' would deconstruct the traditional systems of representation and perception of women and posit women in the position of the subject. (115)

Here it seems that Case considers the traditional form and practice of drama is essentially, by nature, patriarchal, rather than as forms that have been appropriated by masculinist definitions and critical interpretations. Therefore the aesthetics are located within the realm of the form and content rather than as the result of competing interpretations in the intertextual field of discourse. There is also a prescriptive element, then, that feminist drama must reject this "patriarchal" form to create a politically aware aesthetics with women as the privileged subject rather than the inferior object. Some women playwrights may fear that a proclaimed 'feminist' work will

be marginalised, however, they may also face the possibility of their work being received as traditional or less 'feminist':

> The concept of a feminine morphology retains the traditional inscription of gender onto cultural forms, merely inverting the value system. Critics such as Wittig argue that, by valorising the feminine, feminists will keep women in the ghetto of gender. Some theatre practitioners have also responded negatively to the notion of a feminine form. They feel it means that, if they work in traditional forms, they are not feminists (or feminine), and that their work is discounted because of their preference for those forms, rather than seen as marking an advance for women in the field by making their professional work visible.... (Case 130)

Case then argues that certain techniques must be rejected because the methods themselves create a misrepresentation of female sexuality:

> From a feminist perspective, the Method techniques for building these characters lead the female actor into inaccurate analyses of female sexuality. Other acting techniques, such as the playing of an objective and establishing a through line, are also culturally inscribed models from the patriarchal culture ... Logically, the rejection of these acting techniques implies a rejection of the kind of plays they serve. (123)

In a similar move as the argument about man made language, Case suggests that some feminist playwrights frequently write disjointed plays because they do not feel their life experiences can be represented within the 'man-made' structures of drama with its linear Aristotelian demands for plot. Yet there is no evidence that writing styles can be assigned essential genders since, for example, there men who write 'lyric' sentences or 'circular' narratives and male playwrights who have written 'unresolved' plots, and thus have not created good drama according to Aristotelian dictates. Such disjointed plots written by both male and female playwrights may be a more 'realist' representation of how the mind works as it interprets events in time, contradicting and working against the mainstream dramatic construction of neat, chronological narratives.

Because Case argues that the sexual politics are in the "nature" of traditional forms rather than in the surrounding critical practices that (re)produce traditional forms, she therefore suggests that the logical extension of a "new poetics" is women's language and female dramatic form:

> The discoveries about the political nature of traditional forms raises the question, 'is there a women's form--a feminine morphology?' If women are to be the subjects rather than the objects of cultural production, doesn't this cultural revolution necessitate a new form and perhaps even a new discourse for women? (128-129)

This understanding of the "political nature" of tradition is not in the form, a debate that remains located in the struggle to prescribe what essence to what form to be correct. Instead the politics of tradition are in who appropriates and controls the form, such that textual production is not a function of essential "natural" content and form, but of the control of representation through critical power to interpret, prescribe value and influence textual existence. It may be that the creative work of women in drama has manifested different forms of playwrighting or acting and this can certainly be a focus of study; however, if there are new forms they do not automatically become feminine or feminist because they are created by women, nor should this interpretation constitute a political demand for women playwrights. I will discuss the implications of such a demand for specific plays more fully at the end of this chapter, as the pressure for feminists to locate a feminine style or define the feminist dramatic form is a constraint that is often rejected by women playwrights themselves.

Case acknowledges that these questions of form and content involve a major debate between the essentialists and the materialists:

> Feminist critics who prescribe a feminine form have been termed 'essentialists' by their opponents. This means that they ignore the economic and historical conditions that have determined the process of cultural gender inscription. They are termed essentialists to contrast them with materialists, who emphasise the economic and historical advantages of gender

> inscription for the elite class of men in the patriarchy. (130)

It seems to me that this description of essentialists as those who "ignore economic and historical conditions" leaves out the primary definition of essentialism whereby what is stateable, definable, i.e. the meaning of something, is assumed to be inherent according to 'natural' essences within things, rather than as a produced within discourse by critical interpretations about things. Therefore, although Case seems to accept that the concept of feminine forms actually reinscribes rather than criticises the notion of gendered forms, she nevertheless doesn't want to give up the position that a feminine libidinal expression would reconstitute itself in a feminine language and a feminine dramatic form:

> Many feminist critics closer to the materialist position would argue that the notion of a feminine form merely reifies the traditional gender constructions of masculine and feminine--that any liberation for women in art would come from their freedom to create in any kind of formal context. Others closer to the position of the new poetics, would argue that a reorganisation of theories of libidinal development and dramaturgical devices would create a new position for the female desiring subject that would change the way the field of signs is constructed. (128)

The point which continues to be missed is that form is not masculine, forms are restrictive in certain ways. It is actually only the appropriation of Aristotelian dramatic forms and rules by "male reason" which constituted a gender biased tradition that is behind the ideology of a patriarchal discourse. The repositioning of woman as "desiring subject" is really a reversal of values within the interpretive sphere of the writer/reader and in itself does nothing to alter the way "the field of signs is constructed". Writers can disrupt the binary structure of the sign, but the field of signs will always be constructed through interpretations, since this limitation cannot change within representation as a mediated mode of communication.

While Case discusses the two approaches of essentialism

and materialism as oppositions within criticism of feminist theatre, she in the end argues that perhaps both positions can be used for different purposes depending on the situation:

> It seems, however, that certain gains can be realised from both sides of the issue. Perhaps these positions could be combined in some way, or, within a historical context, perceived as alternative theoretical strategies for specific political purposes. They need not operate as competing theories for a controlling position that subsumes practice and organises positions, much like the theoretical strategies operating in the 'Name of the Father'. Rather, they would appear as tactics to be employed when they were useful in either dismantling the patriarchal structure or aiding in the cultural revolution. (130-131)

It is quite apparent that within the context of a feminist critique, women would want to reject the limited interpretations of Aristotle's poetics which rather arbitrarily defined certain forms as good drama and privileged male reason to accomplish these in the construction of a dominant patriarchal drama discourse. However, while it seems necessary to critique and deconstruct the restrictions of a patriarchal structure, it is not obvious how such a structure would be dismantled by creating a "new poetics" that privileges woman as a subject and defines a feminine form of drama. A "new poetics" merely claims that there is another and different form by which to judge women. This does not seem to be a useful strategy but rather a name-calling duel to see whose poetics is better or that both should have equal space--neither of which goes anywhere toward questioning why forms have to be gendered in the first place.

Case constructs an either/or situation where it is useful to employ an essentialist position when dismantling a patriarchal structure--by arguing that there is a feminine structure based on a female libido that can transform <u>the nature</u> of patriarchal discourse. Or when useful, one can employ a materialist position to work on the cultural revolution--by arguing that gender is a historical and

economic construct. It is contradictory to, on the one hand, argue for a position which says that there is an essential form which is feminine and one which is masculine but, at the same time (or when politically useful for the cultural revolution) argue that all gender definitions are socially constructed by ideologies of the family, church and state. However, a poststructuralist deconstruction of this opposition would embrace this contradiction and argue that neither end of the spectrum is totalised or separate. The materialist understanding of gender as a social construction based on relativity to culture, economics and race has to refuse categorising any textual form or social practice as being the result of a 'natural' essential, or absolute quality that is located in only one sex--but it does not have to deny the existence of nature or essence. And certainly the essentialist can acknowledge social constructions that may influence and produce new or different forms, but without using nature to claim these forms as an aesthetics genetically inherent to sex or race for the purpose of using it as a platform of 'real' experience in the judgment of other texts.

Despite Case's attempt to reconcile these two positions in the name of pluralism, the reason for their <u>separate purposes</u> in her argument--one for discourse and one for culture--remains undisclosed. I would suggest that it relates to the institutionalised dichotomy between the literary and the sociological as I mentioned in the previous section. It is this opposition which needs to be continually deconstructed as it sustains the opposition between the 'real' and the 'fictional', (instead of both as real textual constructs) where the 'real' is privileged as the important referent for a politics of interpretation and the authority of experience. The obvious question for a politics of interpretation based on essentialist and gendered criticism still remains: what is a 'real' or 'natural' for men or women at this point in a history of representation?

One attempt to go beyond the notion of gendered writing,

definitions and criticism for feminist theatre is described by Wandor in an interview about her book, Carry On Understudies:

> 'I felt it was absolutely essential this time to have a framework by which plays could be analysed. People have got lazier about how to approach women's work, and this could be destructive to the work. I think analysing creates'. Labels like 'feminist theatre' or 'women's theatre' can, she believes, never be more than 'useful signposts'; the book proposes instead an analytical approach where plays can be rigorously examined according to their different political 'dynamics'. (qtd. in Hinds 30)

According to Wandor, such signposts "are not really helpful in trying to develop an analytic approach which will help us understand what is new and important about the work women are doing in theatre" (Drama 5). Her framework tries "to analyse and understand what kind of feminist dynamic might be present in a play by a woman, I am exploring the overall dynamic, the sum of the whole to which the parts (however different they are) contribute" (Drama 6). In this framework of analysis she does not try to define feminism as a particular genre of drama, but seeks to assess the different political dynamics of feminist theory as represented in plays, such as aspects of radical, liberal, materialist, and socialist feminism which offer different strategies for addressing oppression with respect to economics, race and class. In this sense the assessment of a feminist dynamic moves the analysis of the body of work beyond a prescriptive aesthetics only in the text, to the terms of its contextual political dynamics as relative to the dominant discourse, rather than as separate from it. A framework of analysis which goes beyond the signposts of "feminist" or "women" is necessary strategically to avoid the critical practice of "limited issue" marginalisation, which continuously depoliticises women's texts by refusing to accept them as a valid part of the human discourse. Case, too, examines different feminist dynamics in Feminist Theatre as I mentioned in Part One (B). She looks at the effects of gender in drama from a historical perspective, criticising Aristotle's Poetics in the formation

of a tradition of drama, tracing plot and character requirements throughout Elizabethan and Restoration drama as the basis for an argument on the absence of women in drama, and the lack of strong character parts for women. And in Part Four (B), following the work of Keyssar, Malpede, Gilman, and Schechner, I will offer a nongendered, nonprescriptive analysis of how the differences in plays by women work counter-discursively in a "strategy of contradiction" to deconstruct the homogeneity of dominant forms and representations in the dramatic discourse.

The Politics of the Anti-Canon

In response to these fundamental assumptions and a dominant representation of 'normal' reality, feminist literary criticism has had to critique such literary representations while also examining the methodologies of the institutions of power that reproduce them. However, a vital part of the project to define feminist literary criticism is--like feminism--the struggle not to reproduce the same practices and systems of power. A significant problem with a fixed definition or standard of feminist drama is that it lends itself to privileging structuralist or prescriptive criticism of women's texts, which facilitates their incorporation into an alternative feminist canon that may not in fact be an anti-canon but the mimicry of traditional critical politics using alternative texts and different values.

In a reading of Jill Dolan's "Bending Gender to Fit the Canon: The Politics of Production", an example of the type of play which might be left out of such a feminist canon is Norman's Pulitzer Prize winner 'night Mother, which Dolan feels is not a feminist play. She admits that her review was coloured "by a mistrust of the institutional approval Norman's play received" (Making a Spectacle 335). Looking at the previous Pulitzer Prize winners shows that institutional approval in the form of a distinguished award does not result in mainstream canonisation over time, nor does it automatically imply that the text conformed to canonical

standards, though the critics may have read it as such by ignoring certain themes or their political implications. Dolan's remarks with respect to 'night Mother depend on a certain definition of feminist plays as she says her "review went on to question whether the play is at all feminist" (335):

> The premise alone defies feminist categorizing: If feminist plays are defined as those that show women in the painful, difficult process of becoming full human beings, how can a play in which suicide is assumed from the first moments be a thorough consideration of women? (336)

The idea behind positive role model criticism is that a feminist play must show 'positive' images of women as they struggle towards and succeed in becoming 'full human beings'. This however, assumes that the women were not full human beings in the first place, simply because they were in the process of coping within the structural confines of social gender roles such as housewife, mother, teacher, prostitute or nun. Since for Dolan, Jessie at the outset has already decided she is stepping out of the whole structure, the play cannot be feminist; but what if for Jessie, she becomes a more conscious human being and grasps her form of autonomy by making that choice: to step out of a structure she no longer wishes to be in? In William Demastes' Beyond Naturalism: A New Realism in American Theatre, several critics write that the physical loss of life was overemphasised and that against the background of a world Jessie despises, it can be seen as an act of will, "if there's advocacy [in the play], it's not in favor of suicide, but in favor of autonomy" (Stone qtd. in Demastes 152). Perhaps it may be just as important for women who routinely consider suicide to relate their problems to a playtext that explores what that is, the decision and the act; and while exposing the intersections between personal obstacles and discriminatory social structures, the text may not automatically survive its 'heroine' in a prescribed fashion. Surely there must be room for texts where women are represented making many different choices, and what may be more important for feminist studies is the way the text works

to expose the relationship between the character and their environment, as well as their strategies for survival; a drastic measure like suicide can equally be pointing to an enormous failure on the part of the social system, and not merely representing a character's 'fault'. Certainly a project of feminist literary criticism has been to respond to the limiting gender representations of women in texts, arguing that these images affect women's perceptions of themselves in social practice, but the crucial argument has been against the homogeneity of these images. Thus, while feminist readers may wish to see 'positive', or less restrictive images of women for inspiration, it is also possible to learn from what might seem to be a 'negative' image, and so it may not be valid to judge representations as 'not feminist' because they critique the system from a different perspective.

Dolan also argues that the play is typical of liberal feminist drama saying:

> Like most traditional American dramas, 'night Mother's focus on individual suffering and the play's unwillingness to discuss Jessie's dilemma in terms of a wider social context make it weak as a political statement and inadequate from a materialist feminist perspective. (336)

There are many references to the wider social context which Jessie feels a failure in, a context she dislikes and chooses to leave, stating that this has nothing to do with her epilepsy which has been medically under control for a year. Dolan says the play focuses on "individual suffering" and since she privileged the daughter's dilemma, "with which I felt it was impossible to empathize" (336), what she is really admitting is that she as a reviewer cannot feel empathy for those who contemplate and commit suicide in large numbers everyday and therefore for her the play is simply about an individual's suffering. The next question would be though, how can individual suffering possibly not be related to the wider social context, assuming the person does not live in a vacumn?

Many critics both male and female refer to these

individuals in Norman's plays as "ordinary" in a derogatory tone, as if they were sub-human and not worthy to be leading parts in a stage play. For example, in Beyond Naturalism Demastes says:

> Norman's focus is on women, and her plays present worlds filled with commonplace events and common people, those not in privileged positions in society. Their portrayals in turn reveal worlds and lives that are essentially meaningless. These simple lives, though, extend beyond those people living them. (emphasis mine; 146)

Here these lives are called meaningless though it is admitted that their suffering is somehow extended beyond their own lives. Using the standard of dramatic unities, critics have taken Norman's characters to task for their speech, but it is from a biased perspective:

> Given the realistic design of her works, some critics have perceived an inconsistency between the type of characters she presents and the level of thought they often rise to in their speeches. (Demastes 146)

Kauffman attacks 'night Mother on just this basis, criticising Thelma who has just been informed of her daughter's impending suicide:

> Instead of the hysteria we might expect from this dodo, instead of the screaming or fainting or struggle or even a transparent ruse to get the gun, she casts herself as a partner in a 'clever' cat-and-mouse duet, as if she were accustomed to such crises and were competent to handle them. (qtd. in Demastes 146)

From Kauffman's male dominant perspective on gender which regards women as mentally defective, and assumes that poor, small-town women are even more so, this mother is seen as a "dodo" who cannot possibly be the character engaged in such a desperate battle for her daughter's life. Yet perhaps for people who know small-town women or indeed are small-town women, they might not be so surprised at the levels of speech they rise to and, indeed, this just may be another point of Norman's plays. In an interview Norman explains her characters by quoting the Gospel of Matthew:

> 'Inasmuch as you have done it to the least of these, my brethren, you have done it unto me.' She explains herself: 'That's what I'm doing. I'm

> saying, "Let's take the least of these, our brethren. Let's look at them"'. (qtd. in Demastes 152)

Norman's tactic may not be so much a righteous holier-than-thou attitude but more a strategy to expose the interrelatedness between all people in a society, suggesting there is a shared responsibility for creating the social structures which facilitate that society's emotional and material wealth, and its poverty.

Finally, a reading outside of some notion of definitive feminism within the play can reveal the work done by the play when considering it as part of the intertextual field of discourse. Dolan says that she "saw the play as co-opted into a scheme of male dramatic and ideological values, and noted that women are getting the Pulitzer Prize for plays that" (335):

> depict women killing themselves or living totally immobilized in their backwoods, suburban homes ... It's ironic; or is it? When so-called feminist plays like 'night Mother and Crimes of the Heart are cheerfully honored by the ... coveted prize, there's a not-so-subtle message underlying the Pulitzer awards. It's a form of anti-feminist backlash. (335)

However, if the reader can divorce from the social connotation of suicide as failure within this play, and then read for the cultural production of Jessie's anger by taking her mother's power seriously, a quite different reading emerges. Jessie's stated desire is to succeed at the first conscious choice of her lifetime and through her anger, her fatigue, and her dislike of the global situation, the choice is suicide--which includes extracting herself from her mother in order to succeed. Jessie spends an arduous evening telling her mother about herself and her choice, while Mama battles to maintain the status quo, with Jessie's life tightly entwined around her own:

> I don't know what I did, but I did it, I know. This is all my fault, Jessie, but I don't know what to do about it now! ... Everything you do has to do with me, Jessie. You can't do anything, wash your face or cut your finger, without doing it to me. That's right! You might as well kill me as

> you, Jessie, it's the same thing. This has to do with me, Jessie. (72)

Though Jessie tries to say the suicide is her choice and has everything to do with her own life, Mama tries in a variety of ways to blackmail Jessie continuously with guilt for leaving her alone, insisting their lives are almost as one. Jessie finally screams:

> Then what if it does! What if it has everything to do with you! What if you are all I have and you're not enough? What if I could take all the rest of it if only I didn't have you here? What if the only way I can get away from you for good is to kill myself? What if it is? I can <u>still</u> do it! (72)

In the end, Jessie makes a last attempt to retain ownership and control of her suicide as her choice:

> I'm <u>not</u> giving up! This is the other thing I'm trying ... <u>This</u> is how I have my say. This is how I say what I thought about it <u>all</u> and I say no. To Dawson and Loretta and the Red Chinese and epilepsy and Ricky and Cecil and you. And me. And hope. I say no! ... I am what became of your child. I found an old baby picture of me. And it was somebody else, not me. It was somebody pink and fat who never heard of sick or lonely, somebody who cried and got fed, and reached up and got held and kicked but didn't hurt anybody, and slept whenever she wanted to, just by closing her eyes ... That's who I started out and this is who is left. That's what this is about. It's somebody I lost, all right, it's my own self. Who I never was. Or who I tried to be and never got there. Somebody I waited for who never came. And never will. So, see, it doesn't much matter what else happens in the world or in this house, even, I'm what was worth waiting for and I didn't make it. (75-76)

The play is not about success in the 'usual' terms as society defines it, but departs from the dominant expectations of an audience hoping for the character's survival. The text can be seen as exposing a contradiction, working against the traditional definition of motherhood as always nurturing and an assumed right, with daughterhood as an obligation to fulfill the mother's life--however painful the circumstances. The play becomes a very radical representation that questions what is so nurturing about women reproducing the oppression

of traditional gender roles, aware of their own pain in life but irresponsibly ignoring how the same institutional structures will inevitably limit and hurt their own children. Through the play's critique of Mama's unquestioning acceptance of her lot in life, "I don't like things to think about. I like things to go on" (52), and the reproduction in Jessie of what she experienced as living up to a role, "he always knew I was trying, so it didn't work" (59), the implication is that an alternative is needed to the institution of motherhood purely for personal fulfillment or as a 'natural' pasttime for women, like marriage. The text makes a savage indictment of how little people communicate within the confines of institutionalised roles substituted for lives, and how little they know of each other's feelings. Though Jessie asks most of the questions about their lifetime together, Mama eventually comes to realise she knows next to nothing about her daughter, and her questioning seems to shock Jessie:

> Mama: And I want to know why you've lived here this long feeling the way you do.
> Jessie: You have no earthly idea how I feel.
> Mama: Well, how could I? You're real far back there, Jessie.
> Jessie: Back where?
> Mama: What's it like over there, where you are? Do people always say the right thing or get whatever they want, or what?
> Jessie: What are you talking about?
> Mama: Why do you read the newspaper? Why don't you wear that sweater I made for you? Do you remember how I used to look, or am I just any old woman now? When you have a fit, do you see stars or what? How did you fall off the horse, really? Why did Cecil leave you? Where did you put my old glasses? (55-56)

The text suggests that a crisis is necessary to get people talking, but despite the intensity of their interaction on this last night, Jessie considers it as related to the crisis, rather than as a real change:

> Mama: I'll pay more attention to you. Tell the truth when you ask me. Let you have your say.
> Jessie: No, Mama! We wouldn't have more talks like tonight, because it's this next part that's made this last part so good, Mama. (75)

Perhaps what is feminist about the play is not that women should commit suicide, but the suggestion that conscious thinking and action by women might be necessary to reproduce not equal, but superior, relationships and opportunities for their children, which may mean a radical critique of gender roles that institutionalise dependency and unequal power structures.

Thus, we can see that prescriptive criticism which expects a text to perform according to a certain standard in order to be feminist is mimicking the fundamental principles of a canon which has expected a text to be direct or hard-hitting in order to be a classic. Further, if we acknowledge that the emergence of feminist literary criticism was necessitated partly by the dominating practices of institutions which constructed a literary canon around the exclusion of women and their texts from the discourse, then surely a goal of feminism and literary criticism would be to study the fundamental principles and structures of those dominant institutions, so as not to replicate or mimic them, in a simple reversal with different people in the position of power to judge, select and exclude. If we understand that using representation and an appeal to a male-defined reality, institutions operating under the guise of objective literary standards for 'proper' content and form have really been involved in judging the style of people's creativity based on selection by exclusion according to very subjective standards, then surely the next move would be to question the basis of that process of judgement itself; according to whose reality, whose standards, who does the selection, and for whom? The next deconstruction after that is to ask what necessitates a process where power figures make judgements based on <u>selection by exclusion</u>? Remembering that there is no fixed objective content nailed down 'inside' words, since meaning (conscious, unconscious, repressed, and non-meaning) is constantly produced and reproduced by either agreement, force or coincidence between subjective participants, the whole basis of 'objective standards' for judging 'content' or

'meaning' dissolves; all that is left is appearance or style, and the appreciation of style is really a matter of the reader's selection according to their own interests.

The act of setting up a canon or an alter-canon is in itself a restrictive move which denies the appearance of difference that will escape the definitions of "good" writing established by the particular tradition. The notion of a canon also involves an authoritative committee using judgments for exclusion supposedly based on objective standards, though I have shown that such judgments often depart from standards. The canon appeals to the right way to read, the right way to create, the right way to transfer correct meanings, indeed the right way to read meanings. While every reader when making a decision to read one thing instead of another is in a sense making a selection by exclusion, it is the subjective choice of the reader that is important to acknowledge and value, and this may be effaced with a canon. Until such time as learning is less authoritative and students are self-empowered to determine their interests from an early age, they will require guidance and advice with respect to reading lists, but in avoiding the politics of the canon, there may be more and more of a move away from author centered courses.

Section (E). The Impossible Position of the Female Artist: No(Where) Right(?) to (W)rite

In this section I want to relate erasure as dominance in the intertextual field of discourse to the personal problems of writing as a woman playwright; how this dominance feels like the "impossible position of the female artist", a phrase coined by American playwright, Myrna Lamb. Although they are difficult to generalise, to some extent the effects of 'environmental' negative critical practices on creativity can be located within the autobiographical discourse of playwrights in interviews, introductions and articles. These writings theorise such problems as isolation and lack of support, fear of negative critical reception, or texts being caught between standards of mainstream criticism and certain aspects of feminist literary criticism, such as prescriptive or role model criticism. In addition, contemporary women playwrights have been caught up in the association with modern feminism, suffering from its negative media attention such that women playwrights often resist being associated with feminism as a sociopolitical movement, or with the project of defining feminist theatre. While there are a variety of reasons for this resistance, there appears to be a denial of the heterogeneous ideological forces at work both in themselves as subjects, and in their work, so that, while the writing may involve issues from the feminist discourse, the writer can mentally split off and deny any involvement with feminism. There is also resistance to limiting definitions and recreating the authority of a genre, but a great deal of denial can also be attributed to fear of the negative critical environment. I will deal with the negative environment first, and then discuss the influence of this environment on the private writer.

In the introduction to Women's Writing: A Challenge to Theory, Moira Monteith points out that since criticism itself is a construct subject to various social pressures, "it follows that research interests also will reveal the effects of those forces" (3). However, she argues that the research area which relates the critical environment and creativity as

it concerns women writers has been neglected:

> We need to recognise the legitimate connections between the environment in which a work is created and the finished product and the specific factors that affect women; to explore the relationship between creativity and criticism noting particularly the constraints imposed by any literary canon; and to understand the sense of alienation that some writers experience when they try to use the medium of language that superficially appears free for all. (emphasis mine; 3)

Perhaps one of the most important achievements for feminist theorists has been proving the many ways that language is not "free for all". However, much of what is associated with feminism, including feminist literary criticism, has suffered from homogenising misrepresentations and negative media stereotyping that has reduced the scope and depth of feminist arguments and kept women (and men) from associating with it. Elizabeth Wilson points out in her book Adorned in Dreams that:

> from the earliest days of contemporary feminism the mass media promoted a caricature of feminists--the bra-burning 'women's libbers' who hated men but dressed just like them; a caricature virtually unchanged from nineteenth-century Punch. It seems that bra-burning was an invention of the media. There were, however, many demonstrations, both in England and in America, against sexism in the media, against the way in which stereotyped ideals of beauty were forced on women, and against the way in which women were seen only as sexual objects, not as people. This was an important theme in the early years of the contemporary women's movement but the mass media consistently confused anti-sexism with being anti-sex. (emphasis mine; 230)

While such media slang may not seem important enough to be taken seriously by the population, it nevertheless is a negative and homogenising term for a complex series of arguments, as Wilson mentions. This reductionist representation of feminism is also divisive in that it alienates women from different classes which were already working for issues that could be identified as coming from theories in feminism, as Sheila Rowbotham points out Wandor's recent collection, Once a Feminist:

> Unfortunately, most working class and trade union women know about women's liberation mainly from media ... Many of them have been campaigning for equal pay and nurseries for years and feel understandably suspicious of publicity suddenly given to young, middle-class women. (26)

Further, she quotes Sandra Peer relating a discussion about equal pay at a school in Newcastle in 1970 when women's liberation was raised, and the "doubts" about it were clearly related to media stereotyping:

> All the women had doubts about it, and some were very hostile. By the end most were won over, though I doubt if any of them will ever join women's liberation organisations for reasons of time as much as anything ... Their chief objections were the glorification of outside work as a means of liberation, the anti-men image and the bra-burning image--most of which derive from TV interviews rather than from actual positions taken within women's liberation. (qtd. in Rowbotham 26)

The media images fashioned a perception of feminists as 'radical man-haters' because of its very simplicity as a slogan, and paved the way for the 'I'm not a feminist but' argument so many women have used to complain about a masculinist system, while simultaneously refuting their possible affiliation with an organised movement represented as 'bra-burners'. In a recent newspaper article by Susan Hocking called "A Big Win for Little People" she tells the story of a pregnant woman who won a case to be allowed to work until full term:

> Mrs. Marshall was quoted as saying that although she was not a 'bra-burning feminist', the action of her former boss had prompted her to do something about the discrimination if for no other reason than that should the child she was expecting be a girl, then that child should not be subjected to such treatment later in her life. (Courier-Mail, 10 June 1990, p 21)

Hocking had the good grace to recognise this stereotyping for how it supports a dominant system and notes:

> But it is a little disturbing to realise that Mrs. Marshall, like, I suspect, so many people, seems to believe that it is only so-called 'bra-burning feminists' who normally take action to defend women's rights. That is as incorrect as the

> assumption that it is only hardened, experienced, powerful 'somebodies' who can fight governments and win. In our regular attempts to categorise people who buck the system, we too often bandy around terms such as radicals and stirrers and whingers. And bra-burning feminists. (21)

This kind of simplistic representation which reduces a diverse debate into a harsh us vs. them stance, makes the discourse of feminism and feminist literary criticism extremely vulnerable to losing the participation of many women who, not wishing to be typecast as man-hating bra-burners, refuse or are unable to access the feminist discourse.

Thus many women playwrights--despite their textual representations of the multiple issues surrounding oppression and women--refuse to be regarded as feminist writers, a term which places an added negative signification on the already problematic construction of 'woman' playwright. Keyssar in Feminist Theatre writes that:

> Still others argue that feminist drama's association with the women's movement makes it susceptible to charges of didacticism; just as for some, any gathering named feminist or emphasising women is automatically seen as lesbian and therefore either man-hating or sexually 'perverse', so theatre overtly associated with women is sometimes facilely reduced to demonstrations of hostility towards men and towards heterosexuality. (19)

While misrepresentations of feminism and critical hostility provided a climate that made it simpler to avoid being associated with feminism, some writers argued that their work was individual:

> Some deny the existence of a distinct feminine sensibility and claim that when they focus on women, or reveal gender as a political and social issue, they are simply expressing their individual, idiosyncratic perspectives. They refuse to associate their endeavours with a group, a genre or an ideology. (19)

There are two arguments at work here and they are not necessarily dependent upon each other. A writer can choose not to believe in a feminine essence, a position argued by many feminists, but it does not automatically follow that

what writers express is their individual or idiosyncratic property. The work may not be essentially feminine but the text also is not just theirs, in the sense of the writer as also a reader, and to varying degrees participates in the intertextual field of discourse as a socially constructed, heterogeneous subject involved with many ideological positions of history, including patriarchy and feminism. This intertextual participation and the serial quality of the written text offers a critique of the objective critic as well as the monolithic individual author. While it is certainly valid for women playwrights to argue against their work being categorised into simple genres, or represented as didactically preaching one ideology, a radical claim to separatism where the writer refuses to acknowledge her social association and history is really a literary version of the 'I'm not a feminist but' position.

A slightly different perspective on this resistance occurs when women writers do speak openly about their difficulties as women and writers, but still resist acknowledging their debt to feminist critical thought in their writing. Wandor writes that:

> ... theatre editor Ann McFerran interviewed eight women playwrights, and almost all were either reluctant or very cautious about claiming links in their work with feminism. However, <u>they were acutely aware of the difficulties of working as a writer and a woman</u>. (emphasis mine; <u>Understudies</u> 69)

Despite being aware of their personal difficulties as women writers, there is an inability to connect their own experiences with what they acknowledge is a problem for a large social group, thus publicly denying any affiliation with this social group. Faye Crosby has some interesting theories about this phenomenon in her book called <u>Relative Deprivation and Working Women</u>. I would like to briefly mention several factors from her surveys about which she now concludes:

> No longer do we marvel at the reluctance of women to apply what they know about sex discrimination in general to their own personal situations. The

> wonder now appears to be that anyone could make the application at all. (165)

Several factors she finds important are: 1) women have a different notion of deserving about money and status; 2) it is cognitively more difficult to process ideas about deserving when dealing with real individuals than when dealing with classes of individuals; 3) it is difficult to perceive any individual personally as simply the embodiment of an abstract category and it is even more difficult to perceive oneself in such a way; 4) individual suffering, unlike group suffering, appears to call for individual villains and a situation of perceived powerlessness may make this extremely difficult to deal with; and 5) the employed woman may separate her perceptions about the plight of women in general from her perceptions of her own case because in many situations to define onself as a victim is to invite denigration (162-165). Acknowledging that there are many factors which reinforce "the separation between one's own fate and the fate of the group" she says that they all contribute to illustrating (165):

> how the step from knowledge of the group's situation to an understanding of one's own situation, which is quite a small step logically, can become a chasm psychologically. (165)

Crosby also points out that "the lack of communication structure among women may also serve to keep each woman uninformed about her own position" (165). Here the absence of erasure plays an important role in keeping women "uninformed".

The reluctance of women playwrights to associate their work with feminism even though they may be aware of their own individual problems as women writers, can therefore signify several possibilities: that they are still seeing their problems as personal inadequacies; that they may ascribe some of their difficulties as writers to being women but because the critical environment functions as a "group villain" so to speak, it is too difficult to fight on an individual basis without "inviting denigration"; and finally that this critical environment is simply too harsh for them

to make the public association. The psychological chasm some playwrights personally face when being classified as a feminist or woman writer can still be related to the identifiable, negative significations that critics' place upon terms like 'feminist' or 'woman' writer, as evident in this comment by Caryl Churchill in the introduction to Enoch Brater's Feminine Focus: The New Women Playwrights:

> I remember way back somebody writing about one of my radio plays, and saying that you wouldn't know it had been written by a woman. The writer clearly meant this as praise, and that gave me pause. Most of the time I didn't think about it, but there were little moments of realization. If, for example, a critic refers to you as one of the best women writers, and you feel there's any possibility that he thinks of that as a lesser category, you resent the use of the term. If it means women themselves thinking about things that they haven't thought about before, then you feel very positive about the idea of being a woman writer, and obviously this is attractive and powerful. (xiii)

Despite the presence of negative critical perceptions about feminists and women writers, it is likely that the increase in women playwrights since the 60s was to a large degree due to the more visible presence of explicitly acknowledged feminist plays, as Wandor argues:

> Few women writers would see themselves as feminist writers yet it is clear, particularly with younger women, that they would not be writing so freely had it not been for the presence of a more explicitly feminist theatre. (Understudies 69)

Thus the presence of acknowledged feminist writers acted as a communication vehicle between women and provided a platform for group resistance because the plays openly attempted to identify the shared existence of women's oppression beyond the individual problem. This sharing implicated a larger institutionalised ideology and such plays gave more women the freedom to break the spiral of silence. However, the development of a genre of feminist theatre was a concern not only because of problematic and prescriptive definitions but for the issue of replacing one authority with another. Keyssar notes that in its early stages:

> many feminist playwrights deliberately resisted definition of the genre ... some practitioners felt that to define the genre was to place inappropriate constraints on a form that aimed at diversification. To avoid the simple replacement of one elite and compound voice with another, it was argued that no individual voice should bear the authority of definition. (18)

In addition, the general acceptance and distribution of women's work by its representation as a recognisable genre of 'feminist theatre' becomes problematic in that it falls prey to the further marginalisation as being of interest only to women who are feminists, similar to the earlier critical practice of labelling a play like Akins' The Old Maid as a woman's matinee play. Michael Billington, of the Guardian, worried that there would be: "a gender ghetto where men write about men successfully and women write about women successfully" (qtd. in Understudies 85). It is debatable what is meant by "successfully" but, in any case, the gender ghetto was already constituted by the (hu)man discourse long before modern feminist theatre.

Public Tradition: Private Writer

The public effect of tradition on women writers with respect to production, publication, and erasure, is in some ways easier to document than the private toll of this environment, but the latter is equally important to consider, even though it can only be written as individual cases of specific experiences which might apply to others. The anxiety many women writers feel in the struggle to write freely, when they are aware of biased critical judgement, is part of a fear pattern that produces an excessive internalised necessity to be 'right' so as to avoid this criticism. In Section Four (A) I will discuss this as part of the 'power over' system in the construction and imposition of authority by social institutions; wherein this fear and anxiety has been normalised in societies organised around hierarchy and competition to the extent that it affects most people, but is more pronounced in those who have low status either because they are very different, or are represented as very different and in the minority. In The Madwoman in the

Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination, Gilbert and Gubar refer to Harold Bloom's theory of the "anxiety of influence" that writers are subject to from a previous tradition of literature, but they suggest that for a female writer it is different:

> Certainly if we acquiesce in the patriarchal Bloomian model, we can be sure that the female poet does not experience the 'anxiety of influence' in the same way that her male counterpart would, for the simple reason that she must confront precursors who are almost exclusively male, and therefore significantly different from her ... On the one hand, therefore, the woman writer's male precursors symbolize authority; on the other hand, despite their authority, they fail to define the ways in which she experiences her own identity as a writer. (emphasis mine; 48)

Certainly it is difficult to generalise from the individual experiences of writers, though larger trends or problems can be gleaned. The female artist/writer who has read the literary canon is obviously carving out her identity as a writer amongst a tradition of male precursors with particular standards, while the female writer who does not acquiesce to tradition would be faced with writing against representations of gender or literary forms which, at best, may contradict her own experiences but most often excludes them. The anxiety of influence is recoined by Gilbert and Gubar as the "anxiety of authorship":

> Thus the 'anxiety of influence': that a male poet experiences is felt by a female poet as an even more primary 'anxiety of authorship'--a radical fear that she cannot create, that because she can never become a 'precursor' the act of writing will isolate or destroy her. (48-49)

Such writing renders her vulnerable to marginalisation and negative critical reception which, combined with the status of being in the literary minority, makes it easy to understand that women writers often refer to feeling isolated or fearful of critics.

American playwright Myrna Lamb refers to the "impossible position of the female artist", a phrase which not only describes the difficulties of negative critical reception and

personal fear, but also how the classification as a feminist writer sets up the text as part of a separate discourse caught between the critical practices of mainstream tradition and, at times, the demands of prescriptive feminist criticism. Her experience also highlights the ambivalence, resentment, and lack of support for a female artist who criticises gender construction and other dominant social structures--from women who are operating in or are still affiliated with those very systems (Woman 134). Monteith notes that although feminist criticism has been a project of exposing the intersection of gender and patriarchal values embedded in discourse through language, literary and social texts, it has also been a practice that reproduces a traditional notion of criticism with both critic and artist subject to environmental pressures:

> like a solar oven, [it] has proved to be the mirror that focuses literature and concentrates its signifying energy. In accomplishing this it has also made clear that despite all claims to the contrary, criticism is in one particular the same as any construct: it is part of its time and environment. Critics are subject to social and psychological pressures in the same way writers are. (Women's Writing 3)

To the extent that feminist critical practices in "women's studies" mimics the traditional politics of interpretation of the (hu)man discourse, then it also mimics the judgment strategies that produce the anxiety of authorship. Australian playwright Sandra Shotlander is a declared feminist playwright, yet she says:

> The women's movement has certainly affected my work through books, exchanges, and political involvement. There is a danger, however, of having feminist or women's movement critics sitting on one shoulder and mainstream critics on the other while you are writing. Feminists can be extremely negative. (emphasis mine; Belles Lettres, Sept/Oct, 1986, p 5)

I find this statement disheartening, and if this is the kind of environmental pressure cooker that artists/theorists must work within, it surely must signify the necessity to rethink and hopefully restructure the purpose and politics of

literary criticism.

Sharman Macdonald expresses her isolation as a writer because she lives outside London, and also the problems of having her first play When I Was A Girl win a prestigious award and become published. She says that she's:

> felt 'under a lot of pressure since the Standard award; I've got a new playscript to complete by Christmas, and another two novels planned. Sometimes I just feel tempted to go and work for an actor friend who's a caterer, and chop up carrots'. (qtd. in Hinds 29)

The pressure she describes is her own feeling, as she says, but it is also indicative of her awareness of a "standard" set by her first play, and the anxiety associated with critical expectations and reception of any future work. The necessity to finish a play by Christmas also implies her new status now as a 'professional' playwright, rather than one who is seen to be writing merely for her own pleasure. This evidently suggests that she must take on the definitions and personal requirements of the professional structures, such as writing as paid work, consequentially incorporating time as money and as a limiting factor in production deadlines; and the ongoing need to continue marketing successful play products in the future. Her statement about working for a caterer perhaps indicates the desire to escape the 'pressures' or anxieties she now experiences in writing which are heavily weighed with the critical reception mechanisms in place for women writers, in addition to the standard assumptions of success and professionalism that would apply to any writer. Most female writers would be aware to varying degrees of the lack of successful women playwrights, hence the dominant negative tone of their critical reception sets up a fearful expectation that the writer, in a sense, writes against in the first instance. Lyssa writes about Pinball, which was called a critical success:

> When I had to sit down and write this Afterword for Pinball's publication, I was paralysed for days while the deadline got closer. It was the old problem of not trusting myself to write anything good enough. Back came the terrible fear that the critics would get me whatever I did. Hadn't Brian

> Hoad, when he was reviewing Pinball's first production, dismissed the play as 'yet another piece of crude and tedious female chauvinist piggery'? (emphasis mine; Plays by Women, vol. 4, p 157)

Even in the face of success, there is still an extraordinary anxiety to prove themselves again and again against the continued negative critical reception which was illustrated above in the contemporary reviews of successful women playwrights.

One part of being caught between the mainstream or alternative feminist theatres is that what seems to be the personal choice of production vehicle actually becomes a political strategy for gaining exposure of the woman playwright's work, but this choice in itself presents problems with the representation and reception of crucial issues in the text. In her Afterword to Pinball, Lyssa asks the question, "what happens when women put into the mainstream, plays that seek to question very deeply the power lines of our society, including those in the theatre itself?" (157) and describes her experience of Pinball being done at the Nimrod:

> The cast were lovely, I liked them very much, but I felt that on the whole their interest in the concerns of the play came from their desire to put on as good a performance as possible, rather than from an interest in a radical questioning of society and its effect on their own lives. It meant for me that my play was given a smile on the outside, that its heart was not quite understood. (157)

When Pinball was done by a radical theatre troupe in Adelaide which had politics as the "stated stuff of its life" (157), Lyssa comments that she didn't need to explain to anyone why she was a feminist but:

> [they] got so caught up in the serious message of the play that they tried to pretend that it wasn't a comedy. They couldn't see that they were spoiling it by damping down the belly laughs, or that the revolutionaries in the play do actually send themselves up. In several places they even altered my script or my stage directions to kill a laugh or a light-hearted or ironic moment. (157)

What Lyssa is highlighting here is an interesting problem of

incorporating her play into the assumptions of the identity of differing companies, but the exercise also suggests that the critical reception of her play would be necessarily be interrelated with the representations of each theatre company. In addition, as Olauson points out, there is a different kind of pressure in working with a mainstream theatre because:

> To add to the already present difficulties in having their works produced, playwrights were confronted by the fact that the decision to produce a new play often was based on how successful a play might be in terms of financial return to its backers and producers and not necessarily on its artistic merits or its social concerns. (159)

This would also be a problem for any playwright of course, but it is amplified in the case of women who have little choice of production in the first instance. The choice for women writers who have written plays which question the status quo, is between the possible greater 'success'--and therefore greater audience exposure--of a play produced in a mainstream theatre company with the accompanying risk of a watered-down script, versus the likelihood of obscurity in an 'alternative' fringe company. This 'choice' is not merely one of personal integrity but, ultimately, one which pivots around the politics of representation and critical reception: of the text, the writer, and the company. As Case points out in Feminism and Theatre:

> The importance of the author's intent gives way to the conditions of production and the composition of the audience in determining the meaning of the theatrical events. This implies that there is no aesthetic closure around the text, separating it from the conditions of its production. The performance text is constituted by the location of the theatre, the price of the ticket, the attitude of the ushers and the response of the audience as well as by the written dialogue and stage directions. (emphasis mine; 116)

As the intertextual factors of production in a male-dominant society impinge upon women playwriters to make their 'position' as female artists impossible, so do these same factors contribute to making possible the position of the

male artist; therefore the same conditions which erase women, actually promote men.

Finally, Lamb describes the fear of critical reception and the difficulties of being labelled a "feminist" playwright in her article "Female Playwright: Female Confessions of a Fallen Woman" from Woman as Writer. Though her 1970 play, The Mod Donna, was called "the first feminist musical" (133), she is an interesting example of the denigration and lack of support for a writer who openly challenges social institutions and who is also overtly publicised as feminist. The Mod Donna "was seen as one of the earliest theatrical events of its kind to receive significant public attention" (Olauson 128). Lamb specified that the play was "a modernized version of wife-swapping founded in the traditional ménage à trois situation" and, using a soap opera parody, contrasts two couples, the haves and the have-nots (qtd. in Olauson 128). In The Mod Donna Lamb represents the limitations of the institution of marriage and wrote in the introduction to the published version that "marriage is two people becoming one, which wasn't really the idea in the first place ... Marriage is a fitting punishment for the genuinely obscene reasons for its existence" (Mod Donna 7). Her play's critique was received by some as "a lucid and stimulating view of modern male-female relationships" (Olauson 129), but it was also called "a puritanical, anti-sex lecture" which "proceeded by logic that was neither masculine nor feminine, 'just dangerous'" (Oppenheimer and Brukenfeld qtd. in Olauson 129). In Brukenfeld's review called "Off-Off" he seems to get off on this "danger" as his text reveals a love/hate relationship with Lamb versus her work, characterised with almost sadistic sexual overtones:

> My reactions to the ... show are ambivalent. What I like are its anger, its courage, its wit ... But I find little satisfaction in the story itself ... But the strongest part of "Mod Donna" is Miss Lamb's gorgeous rage; it puts a vibrant edge on many moments. Although I argue with some of its ideas, her show provides a controversial and instructive evening. Propagandistic, yes. Over-

> simple, definitely. But stimulating, you'd better believe it. (emphasis mine; Village Voice, 7 May 1970, p 53)

Brukenfeld is obviously "stimulated" and not by what he sees as the ideas in the text but by what he thinks is Ms Lamb's "gorgeous rage", taking perhaps a slightly sadistic pleasure (oh my, hell hath no fury like a woman scorned) in the personal writer rather than the representation of a social problem. According to Olauson, Brukenfeld also saw Lamb's play as "allowing a philosophy which saw culture as the only determining factor in her characters' lives" and that meant to him that "Lamb had done nothing to mitigate the problem she posed" (Olauson 129). What he actually says is:

> But in creating her characters she proceeds from the outside in, from a philosophy which sees culture determining our lives. She rails against people's making one another into objects, yet her four characters are objects, and their hang up isn't cultural but dramatic. (emphasis mine; Village 53).

Brukenfeld escapes from seriously addressing the implications for notions of romance and marriage as social constructs, female sexuality as property, and the relationship between institutionalised male ownership and masculine possessiveness, themes which are represented textually in the culturally manipulated lives of the characters. He does this by reducing them to simple dramatic flaws. And in his next comments addressing Donna's speech where "she shouts to the rafters that she will not be a human sacrifice to his manhood" (53), he reduces the audience to dramatically illiterate, prejudiced objects:

> My sympathy went to neither Donna nor her husband--they are paper thin characters--but to the many playgoers who broke into wild cheering. They, of course, had come loaded for bear, or more accurately, straw-manhood. (53)

Another critic negating audience appreciation. His perceptions of the author's writing philosophy shows his own belief in an "inside/outside" boundary with respect to character, in which the two are impermeable and, further, that for him there is a preferable directional flow between

the two; namely from inside to outside. He separates the personal/social opposition and then presumes he knows Lamb's directional intentions. He loves her rage so presumably that might have come from the 'inside'. He presumes that Lamb has imposed an 'external' philosophy which somehow has nothing to do with how people feel on the 'inside' thus rendering them objects, "paper-thin" characters in his opinion. However, the audience's wild cheering may suggest otherwise, or else we have to agree that all the people in the audience are also paper-thin.

Lamb's text poses a social institution i.e. marriage, as a problematic cultural power structure which seriously affects her characters' lives, thus deliberately blurring the inner/outer notions for the construction of character. The text also puts into question the purity of the individual consciousness to remain totally unaffected by culture, insisting that the cultural and the personal are interrelated. Yet it is Brukenfeld's review that construes the characters as "paper-thin" cultural objects only, as he makes a simplistic either/or assumption that the text must and is taking one side of a binary argument: either individual freedom or cultural object. What he does not recognise is Lamb's implicitly optimistic argument that if the inner/outer is related, problems recognised and attributed to social construction can be solved through personal and collective social awareness, responsibility and action; whereas problems attributed only to the individual's essential biologically defective 'drives' or bad 'nature' are beyond control except through incarceration, institutional correction or behavioral measures such as lobotomy and drugs. Despite the text's insistent representation of problematic links between class and sexuality, the critique of the cultural construction of individuals by social institutions was largely ignored or misunderstood, perhaps due to a longstanding emphasis in America on a rhetoric of personal freedom. Artists who question this firmly entrenched belief system still have problems with critical reception. Laurie

Anderson, a contemporary performance artist in New York, juxtaposes this American belief in total, conscious individual freedom against impinging social forces in her piece, Americans on the Move: Parts 1 & 2:

> **Female Reader:** In our country, you're free and so you're born and so they say, 'You're free'. So--Happy Birthday! And even if you were born to lose--even if you were a complete wreck when you were born, you might still grow up to be President.
> **Male Reader:** Today, you might be an average citizen, a civilian, a pedestrian in the street, but tomorrow you might get elected to some high office, or suddenly sell your novel and become famous overnight. Or, you could get run over by a truck and your picture could get in the paper that way. Because you're free and anything might happen. So, Happy Birthday. (Drama Review, T86, p 58-59)

Anderson then plays with the interrelatedness of society, implying the element of mimicry and therefore mutual interrelatedness between government and the people:

> **Male Reader:** He didn't know what to do so he just watched the government. And he saw what the government was doing, and then he just kind of scaled it down to size and ran his life that way. (59)

Mel Gordon writes that "despite the dense theatricality of Anderson's work, her support and renown seem to come almost exclusively from the art world" (Drama 51), and she is relatively unknown to those involved in experimental theatre.

Lamb's work as an artist puts into question the accepted gender roles for women, and the public support of a radical play becomes relative to what hat a female associate might be wearing: revolutionary, financial independent, or employee. In Vivian Gornick's Village Voice evaluation of The Mod Donna, she apparently rebutted all other reviews of the play as inaccurate and missing the point:

> The real driving force and theme behind Lamb's presentation ... was woman's imposed and self-imposed obsession not with sex, but with sexuality, the obsession with her own desirability that powers all her actions, and her rage at having no other means by which to define herself. (qtd in Olauson 129)

Meanwhile, Lamb herself was constituted by Gornick as an

embodiment of the feminine. Olauson summarises Gornick's review as follows:

> Gornick believed that although Lamb was an unpredictable writer ... with only 'partial control', her work was stabilized by emotional truth and self-awareness, qualities that were only just beginning to show themselves in Western culture as the true totality of the feminine mind; thus, in her view, Lamb was the 'first true artist of the feminist consciousness'. (129)

Basically Gornick is conceding structural failures in the text due to the writer's "partial control"--and this might please reviewers who see women playwrights as lacking the discipline of logical form in the first place. However, she then tries to recover a positive definition of the play's "stabilising" strength--not in the representations offered in the text--but by claiming the writer's own emotional truth and awareness as being the feminine totality, which then somehow constructs the author as a feminist representative of this new totality. But this sliding of Lamb's work into another controversial and largely unaccepted discourse then pits the feminist playwright against the women who have become entrenched within the dominant system of power structures. It is Gornick that Lamb refers to when she says:

> Orders to die. A top feminist woman, who has told me, weeping, that I am the first artist of the feminist consciousness, is compelled to turn her back on this work after she has promised support. She cannot afford to affiliate with establishment failure. (Woman 135)

Thus burdened with this essentialist label Lamb became in her words "the double female" in the "impossible position of the female artist" who is "resented for my achievement at the same time I am despised for my failure" (Woman 134). Writing as a woman she is subjected to all the historically proven gender-biased critical practices that, seemingly blind to what she has written, can operate to exclude her text, while comforting themselves with traditional literary standards. But writing as a feminist she is named, organised, and more dangerously visible, as she steps out from the silent safety of her gender role, probing for space to write where there

appears to be no waiting vacuum, and threatening the patriarchal ideology which is an entire way of life. For this ideology to survive, the text of the feminist writer, like feminism and the discourse of feminist literary criticism, must remain isolated, designated as dealing only with women's personal problems:

> But I should have understood there was no way to beat the system ... And then the routine unforgiving backlash. The ordinary co-option. The recognition that there is no support system for a strong female artist who tells the terrible subconscious truth in an almost too-proficient manner ... Unpleasant truths about societally indoctrinated and enforced self-hatred ... Die, they say. Stick your head into an oven and achieve canonization. (Woman 134)

She concludes "Female Playwright" with the following comments, "and the doors shut in my face. But I didn't die. My hunger survived. My curiosity revived. And I am still alive. A female playwright" (Woman 136). She will write, but the question really becomes: when will she be received?

PART FOUR. Conclusion: The Erasure of Erasure, or Towards a Human Discourse

Introduction

'If you find an orange petal floating along the air on a summer day, what does it bring to mind?' The children would clamor to answer that it brought to mind a field daisy. 'Just so!' the old woman would exclaim. 'The idea of the entire flower exists perfectly in even one petal, as a song resonates in the air after the last note is over. That,' she would muse, 'is something like the idea of freedom. It lives nowhere and everywhere at the same time. It lives in the connections'.

Robin Morgan, The Anatomy of Freedom

As my conclusion, I would like to summarise by asking questions and making suggestions. In my research I have found that erasure in the (hu)man discourse arises predominantly from a (hu)man/woman dichotomy, where women, their plays, and feminism have been represented as dealing with "women's issues". This separatism arises from philosophical perspectives that are oppositional and essentialist, representing male and female as not only opposite sex, but opposite people, reflected by a gender biased criticism that has excluded women as inferior opposites. The dramatic tradition has largely been constructed with practices of literary criticism using a politics of interpretation, where the authority of experience is based on 'real' experience in a discourse that privileges the public realm over the private realm. This discourse has operated with a logic that creates and then strives to eliminate opposites as contradictions in the preservation of meaning, truth, and identity. Therefore, within the masculinist identity of the (hu)man discourse, the female playwright functions as a site of contradiction because of her gender, and because of issues in her plays which represent contradictions to dominant social definitions; here she and her subjects are erased and subjected to nonproduction. Because of this, I have argued that the erasure of women playwrights is really nonreception--sustained negative reception coupled with anthological exclusion--in a discourse where prejudice and power have

operated beyond institutional standards to exclude the few texts of women who have managed to win awards, such that they were never published, or were dropped from anthologies very early. Thus the politics of erasure as dominance do not only emerge from biased standards, but from the prejudiced belief systems about the inferiority of women to comply with these standards, and from the dislike of difference as represented by women.

My thesis, then, is that erasure has been a tool of dominance that produces manufactured absence in the intertextual field of discourse, which represses dialogue, and leads to the dominance of particular definitions, belief systems and worldviews that colonise the imaginations of both the female and male. In speculating on the potential erasure of erasure, it seems necessary to move away from dominance in discourse, to look for different philosophies and methodologies of literary criticism that embrace contradiction, encourage dialogue, and shift from a politics of interpretation based on the authority of experience. In addition to changing structures, though, addressing mental belief systems of inferiority will also require a change in the oppositional way of thinking about difference. In Section (A), "The (De)colonisation of the Imagination", I will discuss some of the work that analyses power as dominance, suggesting that gender and power need to be redefined to go beyond the historical reaction to difference as aggression or defensiveness. In Section (B), "Women Playwrights as Rebels: The Strategy of Contradiction", I will offer a nongendered, nonprescriptive approach to reading difference in the plays of women as they relate to the intertextual field; where they can be considered as employing a strategy of contradiction not to be eliminated, but to be included as performing useful cultural work in displacing the centrality of dominant definitions. In Section (C), "The Politics of Textuality: A Different Path to Criticism", I will ask questions about the purpose of literary criticism with respect to the construction of Knowledge, suggesting

that a politics of textuality which acknowledges subjectivity, self-reflexivity, cultural relativity and historicity, can shift away from the practice of interpreting meaning or making good/bad judgements based solely on some notion of aesthetics located only in the text. The purpose of knowledge can shift from dominance and power to an involvement with the constructions of meaning, in what Foucault called "a science of interpretations", which is the study of reality constructs as they affect the intertextual field of discourse. This shift may also change the way we practice literary criticism on what Derrida calls "plastic" or art texts, embracing imitation rather than interpretation of meaning in the text. Finally, in Section (D), "The Quantum Anthology: An Intertextual Matrix, or a Place To Dialogue", I have suggested an anthology that can more accurately reflect the intertextual field of discourse, and thus can also help clarify the elements involved in textual production, other than some notion of essential "goodness" or "badness" located only within the plays. Here I conceive of a mixture of texts that crosses the literary, sociological, fiction, and nonfiction boundaries, mixing plays with reviews, and social commentaries on the issues represented by the plays, so that the way meaning is created in the field of discourse can be better appreciated by students and readers. In a sense this is a "quantum" anthology, making the leap from a monocollection to an intertextual matrix (a womb like place that encloses and gives origin to), where the dialogue occurs within the borders of the text. As Robin Morgan says of freedom, that it "lives in the connections" so, in the intertextual anthology, the dialogue can live in the textual connections across boundaries.

Section (A). The (De)Colonisation of the Imagination

I have argued that the colonisation of the imagination, particularly with respect to gender and power, occurs through dominant social definitions constructed by erasure and the manufactured absence of difference in the intertextual field of discourse. In this section I wish to discuss work that suggests transforming the structures and definition of social systems that produce dominance to assist in the decolonisation of the imagination, thereby enabling a different response to difference to emerge beyond aggressiveness or defensiveness. This work analyses some of the colonising social systems where different perspectives have been erased, while some male writers such as Brazier, Heath and Reynaud are beginning to address their own colonisation with respect to gender, power and masculine aggressiveness. Finally, Lichtenberg, using the work of Scottish philosopher John MacMurray, deconstructs the opposition between victim/oppressor by discussing the relationships of equals within power relations as a way of empowering victims.

Cixous points out in "Sorties" that sexual difference within gender socialisation is so culturally embedded as a framework of logic that it affects the imagination of every person:

> To predict what will happen to sexual difference--in another time (in two or three hundred years?) is impossible. But there should be no misunderstanding: men and women are caught up in a network of millennial cultural determinations of a complexity that is practically unanalyzable: we can no more talk about 'woman' than about 'man' without getting caught up in an ideological theater where the multiplication of representations, images, reflections, myths, identifications constantly transforms, deforms, alters each persons imaginary order and in advance, renders all conceptualization null and void. (New French 96)

Similarly, Foucault argues in the Preface to Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia that the acceptance of the definition of power as dominance is not only evident at the highest political levels:

> Last but not least, the major enemy, the strategic adversary is fascism ... And not only historical fascism...but also the fascism in us all, in our heads and in our everyday behavior, the fascism that causes us to love power, to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us. (xiii)

Thus the definitions of gender and power as dominance are constructs that encroach upon the everyday thinking and behaviour of people.

Wilhelm Reich explored the construction of mental colonisation with respect to gender and power as facilitated through social methodologies imposed by family, school and state. Reich's argument illustrates that in a critique of the social construction of power systems like patriarchy, and the role played by the colonisation of the imagination which affects both sexes, it is impossible to continue marking this problem off as 'domestic' or merely 'women's issues'. In such a cultural critique it is, rather, necessary to consider the interrelationship of the domestic/public spheres when exploring the reproduction of people's continuous acceptance of authoritarian practices.

Reich argued that there were strong links between the repression of sexuality, autonomy and creativity while Freud saw the suppression of sexuality as necessary to civilisation. Reich broke away from Freud because of a contradiction in their clinical experiences and fundamental assumptions about 'culture', 'nature', and 'the reality principle' which Reich criticised as being bound up in a "mechanistic concept of the absolute antithesis between sexuality and culture" (18). He argued that these dichotomies had political consequences:

> This is substantiated by such phrases as that the 'reality principle' requires the postponement of instinctual gratification. The fact that this reality principle is <u>itself relative</u>, that it is determined by an authoritarian society and serves its purposes, this decisive fact goes carefully unmentioned; to mention this, they say, is 'politics', and science has nothing to do with politics. They refuse to see the fact that not to mention it is also politics. (19)

Reich maintained that Freud's assumptions about sexuality as

defined by the nature/culture dichotomy were rooted in a particular kind of culture:

> What is correct in this theory is only that sexual suppression forms the mass-psychological basis for a certain culture, namely, the patriarchal authoritarian one, in all of its forms. (10)

Reich felt that patriarchal sexual power relations produced within the family were largely responsible for creating the conditions which made a mass acceptance of authoritarianism possible and he argues that "it is a matter, first of all, of eliminating the economic enslavement of women and children. And their authoritarian enslavement" (29). Sydie agrees with Reich and also points out in Natural Women, Cultured Men, that hierarchical arrangements of authority and competitive power relations are not an invariable form of social organization (170):

> data have always been available to show that egalitarian relations between women and men have existed in many cultures, and that if anything, they are more 'natural' than the relations of dominance and subordination found in stratified societies. (Leacock qtd. in Sydie 170)

Societies where women occupied a more egalitarian position, or even a central position, were regarded as 'primitive' forms of matriarchy and, thus, as not highly cultured according to the male-dominant definitions of civilisation. While male sociologists and anthropologists did not dismiss the idea of egalitarian sex relations, according to Sydie:

> as a general rule such a state of affairs is regarded as pre-social, pre-civilization. Society or civilization requires a division of labour, and the basic, fundamental division of labour is between the sexes. (170)

Sydie states that the early social theorists were not sex-blind, but that on the contrary, sex relations usually formed the basis for discussions of social order such that:

> Their partial perspective rested on their assumption that without male control of women, there could be no society, no culture or civilization, but only unorganized hordes of women and children confronted by predatory men. (172)

Thus civilisation came be predominantly defined by stratified control rather than a freer social arrangement, where

perhaps, women might also have equal power in decision-making.

Reich pointed out that though families participate in "the authoritarian, superficial and external influencing of the children" (240) by repressing sexuality and enforcing authoritarian disciplines upon children, the educational system reinforces and adds onto the formation of an authoritarian structure in the child. He argued that the shift from reproducing an authoritarian structure to a self-regulating one required an education that "would no longer produce and cultivate the conflict between nature and culture, individual and society, sexuality and sociality" (9). In his opinion, the elimination of coercive social practices would allow children to flourish creatively and result in people who would resist authoritarianism:

> a child which is inhibited in its motility is prone to accept any kind of ideology ... In contrast, a child with a completely free motility and natural sexuality will spontaneously resist the influence of ascetic and authoritarian ideologies. (240)

Christiane Rochèfort also argues that the creativity of all children is restricted in the demand for conformity, and particularly for females:

> In spite of everything, I think creativity is a natural activity of humankind. All babies are born with a fantastic potential. But our present-day society doesn't need all that. It needs sheep, for production and consumption. In terms of potential, what is not necessary is not awakened, or it is stifled, or it is cut off: this is the enormous business of children's oppression. Of <u>all</u> children's oppression. This mutilating surgery which affects every child goes further for the poor, for the oppressed races, and for females.... (184)

Thus the socialisation of gender oppression challenges the argument of 'natural' biological differences which can be used to sustain divisive gender, class and race hierarchies. As Brazier puts it:

> Some argue that biology has something to do with it. This may well be true but it almost doesn't matter, since it is clear that society and culture, which are human creations, fully capable

> of change, have an overwhelming influence upon us...Masculinity and femininity are not written down in tablets of stone or of DNA. And that is a message of hope. (5)

The hope implies a possibility of change, as opposed to the conservativeness of a natural order, where Reich argued that the notion of biological fact was both reductionist and mechanistic:

> This naive mechanistic biologism is so difficult to unmask because it serves a definite function in our society: that of shifting the problem from the sociological to the biological realm where nothing can be done about it. (emphasis added; Function, 17).

Thus the biological essentialism of patriarchal assumptions seem inevitable and hinder the necessity to alter institutionalised social structures that have negative results.

Further, the ability to imagine a non-oppositional sex difference has been crippled by a reductionist concept that polarises difference and represses sameness while externalising that which is different as 'other'. Gayle Rubin points out that:

> Far from being an expression of natural differences, exclusive gender identity is the suppression of natural similarities. It requires repression: in men, of whatever is the local version of 'feminine' traits; in women, of the local definition of 'masculine' traits. The division of the sexes has the effect of repressing some of the personality characteristics of virtually everyone, men and women. (Reiter 180)

But Rubin argues that the exaggerated polarisation of gender in the face of greater similarity is related to "an economics of sex and gender":

> Kinship systems rest upon marriage. They therefore transform males and females into 'men' and 'women', each an incomplete half which can only find wholeness when united with the other. Men and women are, of course, different. But they are not as different as day and night, earth and sky, yin and yang, life and death. In fact from the standpoint of nature, men and women are closer to each other than either is to anything else--for instance, mountains, kangaroos, or coconut palms. (179)

She points out that it is necessary to study the mechanisms by which conventions of sexuality are produced and maintained, such as marriage:

> Gender is not only an identification with one sex; it also entails that sexual desire be directed toward the other sex. The sexual division of labor is implicated in both aspects of gender--male and female it creates them, and it creates them heterosexual. The suppression of the homosexual component of human sexuality, and by corollary, the oppression of homosexuals, is therefore a product of the same system whose rules and relations oppress women. (181)

As Cixous argues, the alteration of binary opposite gender construction demands a new consideration of difference:

> Then 'femininity', 'masculinity', would inscribe their effects of difference, their economy, their relationships to expenditure, to deficit, to giving, quite differently. That which appears as 'feminine' or 'masculine' today would no longer amount to the same thing. The general logic of difference would no longer fit into the opposition that still dominates. The difference would be a crowning display of new differences. (97)

Thus Cixous theorises a transformation in gender socialisation as one which would affect the entire organisation of society:

> There is no reason to exclude the possibility of radical transformations of behavior, mentalities, roles, and political economy. The effects of these transformations on the libidinal economy are unthinkable today. Let us imagine simultaneously a <u>general</u> change in all of the structures of formation, education, framework, hence of reproduction, of ideological effects, and let us imagine a real liberation of sexuality, that is, a transformation of our relationship to our body (--and to another body), an approximation of the immense material organic sensual universe that we are, this not being possible, of course, without equally radical political transformations (imagine!). (96-97)

The colonisation of the imaginary takes place throughout the intertextual field--over generations. The persistent representation of feminism as 'women's issues' where liberation consists of equality with men in an unchanged system, and the move to restore 'unequal power differentials' has resulted in a largely one-way shift. Many women have

recognised their social limitations brought upon them by excessive domestic obligations and have entered public life in large numbers in a relatively unchanged system. Yet there has not been enough significant changes in legislation and the structures of work, education, and politics to alter the opposition between the public and private sphere such that a more equal responsibility between men and women for children, domestic work and the work of the public sphere can be imagined and put into practice. This imagining of radical transformations that Cixous calls for does not only require reimagining and redefining feminity, but will also require the redefinition of masculinity and that relationship to power, thus enlarging the notion of feminism into a serious critique that applies to both genders.

There is also evidence coming from sociology and psychology that within the superior/inferior power construct, both oppressor and oppressed suffer from the homogeneous representations that colonise the imagination and create such oppositions. In the New Internationalist's issue on masculinity, Brazier argues that men need to see themselves as the object for discussion and collectively take responsibility for their own contributions to oppression and violence, recognising that so-called women's issues are not only related to women in the colonisation of the imagination:

> We never talk about what it is actually like to be a man. Instead we simply react when forced to by the urging of our female partner or a feminist at work ... This is understandable but it is time we stopped seeing 'women's concerns' as only being relevant to us when they smack us in the face. Women have enough trouble dealing with their own problems in a sexist world without having to take all the responsibility for changing men, too. (4)

The construction of masculinity as it oppresses men--while it simultaneously harms women--has yet to be widely discussed in a serious way by large numbers of men. In Holy Virility, Emmanuel Reynaud describes patriarchy as "the appropriation of women and the struggle for power in a hierarchy between men" (8), and it is one of the few books that discusses the relations between men, the valorisation of 'virility' and the

oppression of women:

> When it comes to abolishing patriarchy the problem for men is not for them to create a 'new man', but, on the contrary, to destroy that 'man' from whom, as males, we have all been created, and who, in one way or another, we have all reproduced. It is to that process of destruction that I hope to contribute by describing men's attitudes to their body, their penis, sexualiity and relationships with women and other men. (15)

Brazier asserts that men lose emotionally by the same definitions of masculinity that oppress women:

> It's time we stopped relying on their emotional strength, their knowledge of relationships and built up some of our own. But we can't begin to do that until we recognize that masculinity as it is currently constructed is oppressive to women ... We earn 90 per cent of the world's income and own 99 percent of its property. We commit around 90 per cent of crimes of violence and 100 per cent of rapes. (4-5)

The very frequency of rape indicates the common assumptions about female availability inscribed within a patriarchal ideology:

> Rape is so common that man almost feels that it does not exist ... if man rapes it is because woman asks for it, therefore it is not rape ... This mental juggling enables him to embellish reality and to disguise the fact that rape, more than being a mental game, is the very real appropriation of a human being through violence and under no circumstances can it be described as a pleasant experience for its victims. (Jacques 8)

While Reynaud calls rape the "archetype of masculine sexuality" (8), it is more useful to analyse how boys are also abused in a 'power over' paradigm, such that the patriarchal ideology of power as dominance is expressed by men who see women as lower down on the hierarchy of power and thus available as sexual objects or property. While the dominance of women, whether directly or indirectly violent, may be an archetype, it is also not necessarily natural.

As Arthur Brittan points out in Masculinity and Power, there is still an attitude which suggests that men are naturally aggressive and 'good' men control this. Brittan argues that male dominance is learned and fulfils a function,

and that "men will only behave aggressively if they have learned it is appropriate to do so" (7). He quotes Lipman-Blumen to describe the functions of masculine aggression:

> Even as small boys, males are trained for a world of independent aggressive action ... Males learn that society's goals are best met by aggression, by actively wrestling their accomplishments from the environment. Force, power, competition and aggression are the means. Achievement, males are taught, is measured in productivity, resources, and control--all the result of direct action. In the Western world, the importance of self reliant, individual action is systematically inculcated in males. To be masculine requires not only self reliance and self control, but control over other people and resources. (emphasis mine; qtd. in Brittan 7)

The crux of the problem for the socially produced dominant subject as one who is "in control" is not only to empathise with those others that have been termed powerless 'inferiors', but to recognise their own victimhood within a gender socialisation that sanctions the cycle of domination-oppression.

Relinquishing the concept of power as dominance and the control of other human beings is a difficult task, because those who think they benefit from the power of property, money and government may not ever actively choose to make the personal and structural changes for shared power which seemingly would diminish their own superiority. Heath relates that the problem for men in understanding feminist theories of power as it relates to their own position in the social field is "like a little scenario of the center and the margin" (25):

> What is difficult for men aware of feminism is not to imagine equality for women but to realize the inequality of their own position: the first is abstract and does not take me out of my position (naturally women should be equal with me); the second is concrete and comes down to the fact that my equality is the masking term for their oppression (women are not equal with me and the struggle is not for that equality). (first emphasis mine; 25)

Therefore the difficult problem for men, or any power position operating within an ideological stance of

superiority, is to realise their own role of inequality within a relationship of domination and oppression.

In Not for Women Only, Philip Lichtenberg discusses the dynamics of domination and oppression, with two main points: 1) that relations between people are relations of equals; and 2) that both oppressed and oppressor suffer limitations by interacting like less than equals within a relationship based on exploitation. From this perspective he argues that the meaning of oppression must now be redefined:

> When what we call oppression, domination, or exploitation is in effect, the intent is for some to gain while others sacrifice. Instead of these intentions being realized, the actual circumstance is that all participants in a relationship achieve lower levels of personal satisfaction ... Oppression introduces indirection, dishonesty, self-conquest, and distrust, so that achievements necessarily decrease. (108)

Based on the work of Scottish philosopher John Macmurray, Lichtenberg says that "equality reigns even when people intend superiority and domination," (108) because both people or groups of people actually are contributing equally to the dynamic of the relationship, though they may not be acting as equals while they interact. With this perspective:

> 'oppression' describes human relationships that are based on assumptions, perceptions, and intentions that violate the realities of human interaction, especially the reality that persons in a relationship necessarily act to equalize. (108)

The implications of this approach are that the costs to those in the more powerful position are greater than is usually assumed; relationships of exploitation lower the quality of life for all participants; and the oppressed participate in their own oppression (108). Lichtenberg says that upon looking closely, there are comparable limitations for both the oppressors and oppressed:

> For example, although the material wealth of the managers in an industrial society is obviously greater than that of the workers, what about their psychological experience, their emotional gratifications? One usually just assumes that it is greater without looking closely. I have come to see it otherwise, to see the oppressors as also

being oppressed. (108)

The traditional gender roles for men and women are just one domain where the division of human characteristics creates a "pattern of decreased gratification" such that both parties can be seen to suffer emotional and material limitations (108).

It is important to address the social belief systems of superiors and inferiors which create victim consciousness--and that the victims of these structures are not the only oppressed:

> By now, this idea is almost conventional wisdom, and we must be certain that we are not blaming the victim when we make this observation. However, this common observation must be put into a theoretical framework. That relationships between people are always relations of equals is exactly the theoretical linkage that is needed. Men gain equally when women are liberated and suffer equally when they attempt to dominate. (108)

Lichtenberg acknowledges that some feminists feel women suffer more than men in direct relationships between the sexes, but he argues that:

> when one looks from the perspective of equality, whether it concerns freedom in the external world, power in handling finances, or sexual relations, one sees different things than when one assumes otherwise and views relationships from the alternative perspective. It is necessary to look for gains and losses of everyone in such interactions. (110)

He points out that the equality of both people represses itself and takes on different roles through the mutual creation of oppression by the "weak" and the "strong" in what he calls the "social-emotional keys to the division of power" (110):

> We see the unfolding of fusion between oppressors and the oppressed through a combination of identification with the aggressor and what we have named 'projection on a primed vulnerable other'. (110)

Theoretically the history of this work emerges from Freud, Ferenczi, Szasz, Reich, Laing and Cooper who have mapped out mutual relationships in the mentality of domination within families and other authoritarian relationships. The so-

called weaker begins to identify with the perceptions of the so-called superior or aggressor. The superior also projects that which it negates within itself onto the vulnerable other, primed by belief systems of inferiority and limitation.

However, precisely because all belief systems are constructs, therein lies the power to recover the relations of equals through a personal and/or collective recognition of disempowering ideological constructs, and by reclaiming the empowerment to act as equals. An important implication when assuming relations of equals, is that power is available for all people, and not merely concentrated at the top of hierarchical structures, as striking telephone operators can demonstrate quite easily. However, while theoretically this may be true, an individual's recognition of (and their own personal internal power to resist) the propaganda of hierarchical social constructs may not be enough for altering collective oppression. As Kitzinger puts it in her article "Fundamentally Female":

> It seems terribly pedestrian to insist upon an examination of the material realities of women's oppression, the actual structural and political possibilities for transformation. And yet this, I believe, is what is necessary ... <u>It is unhelpful to disguise the social and political sources of power by focusing on internal personal power</u>. (emphasis mine; <u>New Internationalist</u> 25)

As I have tried to show in this section, the opposition between social power and personal power cannot be reduced to an either/or situation, such that by focusing on the aspect of personal power one disguises the institutional construct, or by focusing on the social construct one loses the notion of a subject's resistance through personal power, since they are both interrelated. It is important to discover and embrace internal personal power because this is predominantly what is disguised in the construction of victimhood. Yet Christian discusses the importance of distinguishing self-empowerment from the desire for power:

> The nature of our context today is such that an approach which desires power single-mindedly must

> of necessity become like that which it wishes to destroy. Rather than wanting to change the whole model, many of us want to be at the center. It is this point of view that writers like June Jordan and Audre Lorde continually critique even as they call for empowerment, as they emphasize the fear of difference among us and our need for leaders rather than a reliance on ourselves. For one must distinguish the desire for power from the need to become empowered--that is, seeing oneself as capable of and having the right to determine one's life. (Feminist Studies 77)

It is equally important to understand how institutional authority practices like erasure exclude and withhold information which isolates individuals from recognising their collective relationship to others who also suffer in a hierarchical social system that makes it difficult to "determine one's life". That isolation is exactly how many 'victims' continue to see their problems as their own personal failure and cannot take back their self-empowerment, nor organise as a group.

Section (B). Women Playwrights as Rebels: The Strategy of Contradiction

In this section I want to offer a reading of women playwrights engaged in the activity of "rebellious" resistance through representations of "difference" in their plays. I believe a nongendered and nonprescriptive analysis can be used that looks at style, form and thematic representations as they work intertextually, studying the construction of meaning through critical interpretations and reception as these relate to textual production in the field, not just as located in the play. I will discuss differences of style and subject representations in terms of how they work counter-discursively to displace the homogeneity of dramatic forms or social definitions that contribute to dominant notions of universality or reality. In an article by Kristin Williamson entitled "A Room of Their Own Can Hurt", director Ros Horin makes the following observation about women playwrights:

> Women are focusing on interior things and de-emphasising the plot. They're breaking away from realism into a new form, which is more like a landscape. I hestitate to make sweeping statements, but when we read those 66 playscripts we were hit in the face by the similar themes coming through... If any of the six scripts were sent off to a mainstream director now, none of them would get a production. (emphasis mine; National Times on Sunday, 31)

This difference can be called the strategy of contradiction, not as representations to be eliminated because they contradict the dominant identity of the (hu)man discourse, but to be included because they perform useful cultural work in the intertextual field--if the (hu)man discourse can embrace contradiction and difference in the encouragement of dialogue and transformation. Transformation is important, for, as Daly says, "the Women's Revolution is not merely about equality within a patriarchal society (a contradiction in terms)" (qtd. in Turner 225). It is also about being a rebel, and refusing to obey the system that produces inequality and oppression. According to Webster, a rebel has two connotations, one negative in relationship to authority,

and one positive in relationship to the subject. The rebel is one who defies and seeks to overthrow the authority to which he is rightfully subject, or one who refuses to obey a superior; but it is also defined as one who tries to shake off subjection. I would argue that the ideology of power as dominance under the guise of 'protecting' those who are 'naturally' dependent or inferior, is an extension of the construction that represses both male and female subjects in the tradition inherited from Aristotle's worldview. Plays by women that represent problems and violence associated with 'natural' dominance, thus expose the contradiction that this so-called protection is a myth based on repression and force. These textual representations of personal, social and institutional contradictions work to shift the centrality afforded by assumptions of male superiority; displace gender as 'natural' opposites; and through collective recognition of structural problems, theorise power based on association, a definition that challenges power based on isolation and dominance.

Appearance and Style

In the introduction to playwright Rosalyn Drexler's The Line of Least Existence, Gilman comments on the unusual appearance and style of Drexler's plays and language, and suggests an interaction with the text beyond the interpretation of meaning or truth, into an experience of its appearance:

> Appearance is everything and style is a way of living ... Style is neither instrument nor adornment but actual substance, the thing itself. Once you find yourself looking behind the appearance of a play, or any work of art, to discover what its really about, or thinking of style as a means of expressing something besides itself, some purported body of truth previously holed up somewhere, you may come into all sorts of windfalls, but you can be sure they won't be aesthetic ones ... Imagination equals style equals play; until we learn that this is so, we are going to go on hunting like demented ferrets for the truth underneath the surfaces of the plays we see ... and never experiencing what is there to be experienced. (ix)

Rather than a project to define yet another genre which will mark, locate and describe the essence of femaleness or feminist as only in the plays, it might be less limiting to discuss the differences in the appearance or style of women's plays, and how these offer structural critiques of dominant definitions of good drama, while in the intertextual field they perform the cultural work of displacing the centrality of homogenising definitions.

Keyssar argues that most of feminist theatre tended to displace 'realism' as an ineffective tool for portraying disregarded details of women's lives which were either invisible under patriarchal definitions or loaded with prescribed significations. She notes that a conflict or tension in feminist theatre was to represent the often contradictory and different experiences that constituted women's reality within the dominant definitions of life under a patriarchal social structure:

> they strive for authenticity but often the 'reality' that is their goal is not a matter of a photographic surface image but of a metaphor that captures the elusive rather than the manifest gesture ... I would now argue, then, that the tension I initially perceived is <u>not a matter of conflict between realistic and non-realistic dramaturgies but a matter of different angles and proximities of points of view</u>. (xii)

Using the paintings of Georgia O'Keefe and Gertrude Stein's work, she relates these different perspectives to the metaphor of a landscape:

> I would liken the differing perspectives found in feminist drama to different approaches to the desert. From a distance, in certain lights, and especially in the summer and winter, the desert appears drab, mute and single-hued. But the closer one gets, and particularly in the spring, one finds not only variations of tone and sound but at times such intensity of colour and melody that it is difficult to draw away. Both visions of the desert are equally true and 'real', just as the feminist drama that presents a female character wearing the mask of a rat's head is as 'real' as one in which a woman lifts her skirt and appears to urinate on stage. (xiii)

Though Keyssar implies that the feminist tendency towards the

displacement of realistic theatre is a statement about the validity of multiple simultaneous realities, it also operates as a dramatic style that critiques the traditional theory of representation with its task of reflecting reality rather than its role in producing reality constructions. As pointed out earlier, a critical practice and authority based on a politics of experience, is ultimately a conservative practice that privileges whatever view of reality is normative. Thus the feminist critique of an assumed universal reality, along with the development of styles that question the methodology by which that reality is reproduced, is a radical move to displace the dominance of a politics of experience as a way of establishing literary and social authority.

While Keyssar is careful not to make a limited definition of feminist drama, she also does not deny the possibility of a pattern that might have a strategic effect:

> That the presence or absence of realism is not the central issue for feminist drama does not mean that all these plays are alike or that there is no pattern to feminist dramaturgy. Divisions remain between emphases on interiority as opposed to exteriority, between works that separate and works that conjoin class consciousness and gender consciousness, between plays that focus on women's autonomy and those that stress community ... More important than these distinctions, however, is the relentless appearance in these plays of the strategy of transformation, the theatrical manifestation of metamorphosis of contexts, actions and, most crucially, of characters. (emphasis mine; xiii)

Keyssar suggests that such an aesthetics with respect to character has quite a different politics. She points out that in Aristotelian notions of tragedy, drama depended upon the character's self-recognition:

> In his key perception about Greek tragedy, Aristotle argued that drama achieved its effect on the audience by presenting a character who comes to know himself (or herself), and whose moment of self-recognition is revealed to others. Drama has thus traditionally urged us to know ourselves better, to search our histories and to reveal to ourselves and others who we 'really' are. (xiv)

She argues that the tradition of dramatic self-recognition

has had conservative effects:

> Drama that pivots on recognition scenes, where the goal is to stand still and 'know thyself' is essentially conservative; it seeks and embraces what is and confirms the power of individual consciousness. Drama that embraces transformations inspires and asserts the possibility for change; roles and role-playing, not hidden essences, merit attention; we are what we do and what we become, and no one, neither woman nor man, is restricted from becoming other. (emphasis mine; xiv)

She points out that "In contrast to most of the drama of the last two thousand years, feminist drama does not rely on a recognition scene as the pivot of its structure" (xiii):

> In feminist drama, however, the impetus is not towards self-recognition and revelation of a 'true' self but towards recognition of others and a concomitant transformation of the self and the world ... Even in psychoanalytically oriented feminist plays, however, the self is not seen as stable and hidden but as shifting, alterable, admirably and problematically varied. Nor is the world in which characters exist reassuringly unified and solid, but fragmented and diverse. (emphasis mine; xiv)

Because the characters are transformed through their interaction and recognition of others in shifting realities and roles, the kind of feminist recognition that Keyssar describes adds another dimension of awareness to the concept of the self as multiple selves-in-production, rather than the reductionist recognition of a fixed, inner, individual self. In line with the 'personal is political' slogan of the time that emerged out of the collective recognition of oppression upon individuals as a result of the politics of institutions, Keyssar observes that the plays of feminist theatre were developing an aesthetic or style that also had radical political implications:

> The plays created in the context of that recognition do not just mirror social change but assert a new aesthetic based on the transformation rather than the recognition of persons. (1)

Keyssar feels that the emphasis on transformation in feminist drama where the women recognise their situation as individual and collective, not only "enriches and clarifies" (xiv) the slogan that the personal is political, but affirms the

freedom in the possibility for changing social structures rather than seeking to conserve institutionalised definitions organised around assumed biological essences.

As mentioned earlier, Keyssar notes the predominant technique of transformation which is often characterised by constantly shifting scenes and rapid or sudden role changes. While this is neither a predominant essence of nor a prescription for feminist theatre, it is interesting to speculate on the different effects that might be generated by such a writing and performance technique, as compared to the traditional dramatic narrative with characterisation, plot, conflict, climax and resolution centered around the revelation and recognition of a 'true' inner self. Richard Schechner discusses the effects of this technique in his introduction to Megan Terry's Viet Rock and Other Plays, and he quotes Peter Feldman who directed the Open Theatre's production of Terry's Keep Tightly Closed, for a definition:

> The transformation is adapted from a Second City workshop device ... It is an improvisation in which the established realities or 'given circumstances' (the Method phrase) of the scene change several times during the course of the action. What may change are character and/or situation and/or time and/or objectives. Whatever realities are established at the beginning are destroyed after a few minutes and replaced by others. Then these are in turn destroyed and replaced. These changes occur swiftly and almost without transition, until the audience's dependence upon any fixed reality is called into question. (10)

The shifting of realities and character roles disturbs audience expectations of the linear plot and prevents them from having any long term identification with any one role. While Aristotelian definitions of drama might argue that this technique will subdue the emotional reaction of the audience, it can have the effect of arousing more unexpected feelings since there are no usual beginnings, middles and neatly solved endings. As Olauson argues, "by viewing her 'transformations' the audience was forced to watch and interpret the action rather than focus on the personalities of the actors, characters, or playwright" (121). This shift

in emphasis from the individual character or stable reality in transformational drama is a vital part of the characters discovering empowerment through recognition of their multiple roles and relationships to others in a more active, associative and collective process amidst a fluid stage of shifting sets. This is a significant aesthetic difference that emphasises fluidity and change, collective relationships, and the continual process of reality constructions. This differs markedly from the more conservative politics of traditional drama where the hero is a unified subject in a neatly ordered plot--or as in the case of the Theatre of the Absurd, where the hero/subject is alienated from self and from meaningful action in a nihilistic, total absence of plot.

In the introduction to Women in Theatre Malpede discusses the quality of women's tragic/comic texts which reinscribe the aspect of transformation through ritual and the cycles of birth, death and rebirth, rather than the traditional oppositional constructs of tragedy as high drama and comedy as the recuperation into marriage. According to early theatre history, women were the major participants in these early life-affirming rituals:

> 'It is perhaps worth pointing out that in [the seasonal] ceremonies of the type we have been discussing a major role is in fact usually played by women,' [emphasis added] Theodore Gaster writes in Thespis, his study of the origins of drama in the Near East ... Gilbert Murray concurs, in his introduction to Gaster's Thespis, 'It is hardly an exaggeration to say that when we look back to the beginnings of European literature we find everywhere drama, and always drama derived from a religious ritual designed to ensure the rebirth of the dead world.' ... In each and every one of these life-desiring, life-affirming rituals which are the origins of drama, women played major roles as characters, performers, and creators, as the ones who imagined the content and who wrought the form. (4-5)

Malpede argues that the disappearance of women from these rituals coincided with a change in consciousness and a change in theatre:

> Women's disappearance from the creation and

> performance of such rituals marked an apocalyptic change in human consciousness. Now two separate forms, tragedy and comedy, were needed to deal with the full range of human feeling which once had been expressed by the life-cult's cyclic emotional continuum. (5)

Tragedy based on the heroic saga became the model for classical drama that elevated the death of the individual, while comedy remained nearer to folk plays and celebrated life through marriage:

> In tragedy (called 'most sublime') the focus shifted from the rebirth and resurrection of a life-spirit to the battle with fate and the subsequent fall of the specific heroic man. 'Tragedy which took its plots, its content from the heroic saga, from the lives and struggles of individual heroes, ended in death, because in this world the human individual knows no resurrection. Comedy is nearer to the original folk-play and finds its consummation in a revel and a marriage.' (Malpede 5)

This split of more general, life-affirming cycles into oppositional structures where death becomes tragedy and life becomes marriage, has diminished the representation of power through personal transformation that is a vital aspect of rebirth in ritual drama.

Malpede links two other dualistic separations with the split of tragedy/comedy:

> The separation of tragedy from comedy (and of women from acting in the theatre) coincided with another separation: that of god from humankind. Originally, as Jane Ellen Harrison explains throughout Themis, what was worshiped was not differentiated from the worshippers. (6)

The result of this division between the worshipper and the worshipped developed into the monotheistic god where "religious longing would consolidate into the fear/love worship of a single, masculine father-creator" (6). This monotheistic idea was organised around another separation between spirit from flesh. Malpede claims that the spirit/body dichotomy has been one of the most disastrous of patriarchal ideology:

> The spirit/body split claimed by monotheistic religion has been, quite simply, ecologically and morally disastrous. Pillage of the natural world,

> despisal of women, and self-hatred on the part of men who 'fell' from grace have been its results. Tragedy has been its most exalted dramatic form. (7)

She argues that a new dramatic action is required to alter the dichotomies which traditional drama, as constructed through patriarchal ideology, is based upon. She describes this new action as the redefining of dramatic conflict:

> The feminist theatre groups and artists represented in this section, while all working in very different ways, are each redefining the nature of dramatic conflict. This mysterious essence of the theatre is not, we think, an outgrowth of the primitive hunt or tribal war, nor a relic of the pagan (and Judeo-Christian, and nuclear age) customs of ritual murder, nor a memorium of the ancient agon, or battle, between the forces of 'good' and 'evil', nor the supposedly cathartic violence of the theatre of cruelty. Dramatic conflict--or, more accurately, dramatic tension or complexity--is the process of change in which we as women, and men of nonviolent courage, are currently engaged. (233)

For Malpede then, the process of change or transformation in feminist theatre is crucial to the redefinition of drama that is life-affirming, and that this rebellion is a return to the wholism of life cycles rather than the dualism of tragedy and comedy.

Many plays by women do not employ a traditional dramatic plot, with conflict, climax and resolution, but seem more diffuse, unresolved or lacking an obvious centre. Keyssar and Leavitt have specifically mentioned a predominant quality or style in feminist theatre which avoids realistic representation. However, realistic drama is also associated with the linear narrative plot, and the good dramatic requirements of conflict and neat resolution, such that women playwrights may not be avoiding "reality" so much as questioning the limits of an Aristotelian tradition (art imitates nature) that defined linearity of plot as the best representation of reality. A theatre which avoids these traditional dramatic forms may be arguing that linear narrative is not representative enough of different simultaneous realities, or that "nature" is not so simple and

linear. The plays that are diffuse, using unusual language patterns or images, may therefore be representing a different reality rather than a nonreality.

Of course, from a reception point of view, the avoidance of realistic representation could suggest several things such as worry over the critical reception of the author's authority or, it could indicate a fear that the play's issues are too radical and might survive better if couched in more difficult, less obvious textual constructs. It may also relate to Daly's work on language where feminists strategically displace the form of connotations in words by dispersing the binary sign and its dominant secondary significations for gender through associative disruption, a technique which has been called poetic, schizophrenic or bad writing. An example of this in imagery is Tina Howe's Birth and After Birth, where the representation of a four year old child as a large male adult displaces the sign for child, where the secondary signification for child is = small; it also shows a mother overwhelmed by the largeness of motherhood in a relationship where 'realistically' she is expected to be larger and in control. I would call this strategy a more associative process, relating to Foucault's "murmur of resemblance" which is the persistence of perceiving connectivity or interrelatedness between seemingly unrelated things. This can also be a valid form of reality description, rather than always describing identity strictly in terms of logic, oppositions, and difference. When the playwright associates a large image of the adult with the character of the child it stretches the usual size and power significations of that sign, as well as indicating the resemblance between adults and small children. The texts which work with language and imagery to problematise what is real subvert the dominant notions of the well-made sentence and the well-ordered binary sign in a radical process which allows more free play rather than repressing the anarchy in scripts. Rather than see this as faulty writing or bad drama, these texts can be discussed as critiquing

representation as a model of communication dominated by binary structures. They can also be seen as participating in theorising alternative models of perception that relate more to the concept of process and interrelatedness in a field of textual production.

Strategies of Contradiction

Though I have noted differences of writing style in the plays, this observation is not meant to represent a search for meaning located in content and by form but, rather, is an attempt to appreciate style for itself, as an appearance of a critique of a dominant mode, and capable of generating alternatives for discussion. What, for example, does a style that critiques the 'real' suggest for notions like objective reality, subjective representation, literary criticism, structuralism, genre, the canon, and power? Rather than merely recuperate these critiques into a prescriptive definition of what is feminist in plays by women, I have made an attempt to discover the politics behind their nonproduction, suggesting that these plays and their subjects, operating within representation in a gender biased (hu)man discourse have necessarily been marginalised while others have been promoted to maintain the status quo identity. As subjects for nonproduction, these plays have been effectively depoliticised through their removal from the collective social arena where awareness of institutionalised structures as they interrelate with personal problems could be debated. As I have argued, this was done through erasure as nonreception, where prejudice has operated within and beyond institutionalised standards. This discourse has included critical practices of aesthetic judgements and prescriptive criticism that seemed either ignorant or incapable of reading the representations of powerful social critiques in the texts of women playwrights. Further, the texts of women, feminism as a social movement, and feminist literary criticism have been hegemonically classified as pertaining to 'women's issues', with 'liberation' as achieving equality within an unchanged system and, thus, the

work has not been taken seriously as a critique of social structures and the larger political arena. Perhaps the way to repoliticise erased plays, taking them out of their sphere as 'women's plays' and thus revitalising their collective power to share information against the social and political background, must necessarily lie beyond discussions of a newly recuperated feminine aesthetic or feminist prescriptive criticism. Instead it is possible to read them for their erasure against an intertextual background, asking why they were erased, and what social, political and economic definitions existed and still exist which require that these particular texts be erased in the preservation of the identity of the (hu)man discourse. Since the plays of women have functioned as sites of contradiction and thus become subjects for nonproduction, one way to read them politically is to consider what representations have been erased in order to preserve the dominant identity, since these represented subjects, if produced, must "logically" also act to deconstruct these oppositionally constructed yet naturalised ideologies of the (hu)man discourse. What are these key subjects and how do they act counter-discursively to perform the cultural work of displacing the masculinist centre of the (hu)man discourse?

If we consider the myth of patriarchy as one where the male principle occupies the centre and is the superior source of life, it places Man in the position of having a natural right to dominate in a hierarchical or 'power over' pattern that represses self-determination and autonomy in subjects who must submit to externally imposed authority. Plays by women that work to decenter this myth seem to entail at least three things:

1) shift the metaphor of maleness as naturally superior, central, and therefore the rightful wielder of social power;

2) displace the notion of gender as natural opposites instead of a social construct based on force and repression;

3) destabilise the 'knowledge' that power is

necessarily dominance over others in a hierarchical structure with decision-making centralised at the top.

The plays of women that represent contradictory images to the dominant social and gender definitions of a patriarchal system can be seen as performing the cultural work of displacing the assumed realities of such a construct in various ways. In the first case, shifting the assumption of male centrality occurs when plays represent women's reality constructs as the dominant emphasis, or represent gender role reversals which alter fixed perspectives such as Churchill's Cloud Nine or Lamb's But What Have You Done For Me Lately which depicts a man pleading for abortion from an all female court of judges. Shifting male superiority occurs when plays depict women characters who are interested in vocations, who are not passive, mentally inferior, nor only objects of sex and romance. The play shows images of women that are capable of or desire public sphere work, independence and leadership--regardless of whether the plot shows them becoming autonomous or 'succeeding' by imitating a masculinist definition of power in a male-dominant social arena. Such characterisations of women also function to undermine the second assumption that the feminine gender is naturally opposite to the masculine. They represent women as people who may have desires, capabilities and goals that are similar to those traditionally set aside for males, thus eroding the false opposition and emphasising resemblance. The beneficence of polarised gender roles is eroded by plays that represent the violence arising out of 'normal' gender roles such as wife-beating, rape, incest, and child abuse, thus exposing the contradiction of 'protected dependents'. These images show women struggling as dissatisfied wives, mothers, daughters and lovers in conflict with the very social institutions designed to 'protect' but which actually dominate, repress and brutalise them.

The third aspect of cultural work is to destabilise the definition of power as dominance in hierarchical structures that are assumed to occur 'naturally' in gender and social

structures. Plays that depict the contradictions and negative effects of larger social institutions like the industrial-military complex or the state--taking on the world so to speak--work to expose the structural problems affecting women, children and men as a collective rather than simply as individuals. In this sense, the plays address personal isolation by offering a critique of organisational structures that use power as dominance by representing a collective awareness of group problems and the interrelatedness of individuals in the public and private spheres. As Crossley discussed in her talk on "Women in Science" on ABC radio, quantum physics has changed the central metaphor for understanding the world from that of separate building blocks in a machine to one where the central metaphor is that of relationship. As Keyssar points out, many plays feature transformations in character through acknowledgement of their relationship to others, while some plays by women use images of women working together or using communal celebrations of their relatedness. I would suggest that these plays offer a different notion of interconnected strength as 'power with' versus a competitive 'power over'. Such characterisations and images imply a form of organisation that is not based on dominance but nurturance and support. As I will suggest in Four (D), by juxtaposing the texts which hold the masculinist identity in its central place, along with texts which employ the strategy of contradiction that work to decenter this myth, an intertextual collection of women's plays can be organised with texts from other disciplines that challenge masculine superiority or power as dominance. Such a structural organisation that mimics the intertextual field can more obviously reflect the cultural work being done by representations in plays that have traditionally been made subjects for nonproduction in the intertextual field of discourse.

Section (C). The Politics of Textuality: A Different Path to Criticism

In this section I want to ask questions about the purpose of literary criticism, such that a politics of textuality and a "new purpose of textual study" might point the way to a practice of criticism that is less concerned with good/bad judgments based on aesthetics or correct meanings, and more involved with a practice of criticism that is a constant study of social/textual construction and the effects of these as "knowledge" in the intertextual field of social discourse.

I have argued that the politics of erasure is based on dominance in discourse, excluding some subjects and promoting others. Certainly the recuperation of women's texts offers the possibility of deconstructing homogeneous representations by circulating a broader diversity of experience and feelings into the public domain, hopefully to generate dialogue. But in the Grip Report James Sosnoski argues that neither a separatist form of institutional inclusion, nor simple curriculum integration does enough to challenge the definitions behind the value system of the institutional will to power:

> We are inescapably imprisoned in institutions and to the extent that we keep calling them prisons we will inescapably be imprisoned. Terms empower ... We can no longer be fooled by the hiring of Marxists, Feminists and Deconstructionists as token resistors to 'normal' study. Nothing will change the traditional 'normal' study that reigns until Marxist, Feminist and Deconstructionist textbooks are written as introductions to literature among other introductions to literature and until they are used in classrooms by non-Marxists, non-Feminists, and non-Deconstructionists. (52)

Unless the institutional form is questioned for the political effects of its structures, their practices will continue to claim a kind of 'natural' authority, instead of acknowledging that they do have a theoretical basis to their definitions and construction.

One example is the conservative university that claims its canonical teachings are 'normal' while their teachers

employed for 'marginal' or 'fringe' studies are seen as spouting leftist propaganda--the key being that while they are all constructing their own positions, none of which are natural--at least the 'marginal' teachers are usually in the practice of acknowledging this fact. That is why theory is so frightening to institutions for as Sosnoski says:

> Many have locked themselves into a notion that theory overpowers practice. This obfuscates the power structure in literary study. It is also a species of nonsense. When praxis, the generalized account of a practice, is unself-reflexively articulated as 'theory free' it makes invisible and illegible the conditions of its self-disclosure and self-enactment. This is a malign mode of authorization. (51)

Thus the deconstruction of the concept of authority and dominance in literary criticism, suggests the questioning of institutional practices that maintain the power of selection by exclusion through criticism based on a politics of interpretation and the authority of experience. As Christian asks in "The Race for Theory", "for whom are we doing what we are doing when we do literary criticism?" (77).

The struggle in feminist literary criticism reveals that one element at stake is the concept of criticism and its relationship to power. In order not to mimic the power politics represented in the traditional formation of the literary canon (which has used erasure to marginalise competing interests as inferior or peripheral), the purpose of literary criticism needs to be questioned. Is it authoritatively to interpret universal knowledge by "powering over" and denying the experience or imagination of others, or can it be a project of studying textual constructs and their effects in the field of discourse? Can it be to participate in a politics of textuality that acknowledges intertextuality, self-reflexivity of the critic, and complicity in the production of meaning in a more open acknowledgement of "I like or don't like", (revealing more about the critic) rather than a judgement of what is essentially good/bad in the text, pretending to appeal to some authoritative objective tradition? Is it, as Derrida

suggests through his work, a practice that deconstructs the structures of the philosophical text in its rigorous attempt to establish truth, with a positive aspect of only imitating and miming the plastic, or art text? This questioning of the purpose of criticism, as it participates in the construction of Knowledge and power, might lead to the kind of dialogue necessary for a shift to a self-reflexive practice of criticism that is more interested in what Foucault called "the science of interpretation" and how we construct reality in the intertextual field of discourse.

Perhaps this questioning also points to a new area regarding the purpose of textual study. This "new understanding" would theorise textual study not as the accumulation of knowledge used in a will to power which reinforces critical positions that employ ideology as if it were a detached objective judgement, but as an ongoing critique of the basis for knowledge, and the role of criticism and institutions to construct ideological positions and power differentials in the textual field. In other words, is the purpose of textual study to discuss, destabilise and recreate 'knowledge' as a very relative process with shifting positions, or is to accumulate stability, power and dominance in the textual field? John Frow discusses the relationship between knowledge and power in "The Social Production of Knowledge and the Discipline of English":

> Those who rise to the defense of the humanities have in this sense often been their own worst enemies. They have appealed to certain stable and unproblematic values, as though these had not been the object within the humanities themselves of an intensive critique. Assuming the existence of a common culture and a common humanity, they have ignored the unequal distribution of power and the radically diverse cultural systems that these terms have concealed. They have posited the possibility of a disinterested reason, as though reason had no complicity in the play of interest and power that organises the world. They have worked with an essentialist distinction between the humanities and the sciences, rather than noticing the core of criticality and creativity that they share. Most crucially, they have set up

> the world of culture as a distinct and self-contained domain, separate from the world of work and power and without effects upon it. (7)

As he goes on to argue, "the problem is most deeply that of the possible place of critical thought in a capitalist society--that is, in a society which seeks to harness knowledge more or less directly to the generation of profit" (6). Frow points out that the false separations between knowledge, profit, and the social interest function to marginalise the politics of such assumptions:

> And it is naive, even dangerously naive, in its assumption that social interest is external to knowledge. It is rather the case that the goals of research are always determined by some vision of the social good or of some narrower interest; and that knowledge, which is always of potential use, is therefore always in a relation to power. This is not to argue that it need be directly political, but to argue that it is always indirectly so. (6)

A clear example of the indirectly political aspect of knowledge is the way that funding for women in the arts has been a "project by project" affair, according to Chris Westwood in an interview with Sophie Watson, editor of Playing the State: Australian Feminist Interventions. She points out that in the arts "there is no policy as to where we are going or why", so that there is nothing "which you can change to make funds available automatically to women" (220). Funding becomes an ad hoc relationship between the (lobbying) artist and the few women who control the purse:

> That almost always has been the case in the funding of women and arts--the collaboration of me 'outside' and a mate 'inside'. It is impossible for feminists to attack the arts funding bureaucracy from outside with no contacts inside, or for new ideas to develop, not just feminism. (220)

Westwood points out that before the Women and Theatre Project in 1981 and the Women and Arts Festival in 1982, there had been little or no research done on the situation for women in the arts, so the relationship between knowledge, power, and funding consisted of no knowledge, no clear policy, and no obvious pathway to funding. One aim of the festival was to

document the statistics:

> We insisted there be a research committee to look into what was going on, because there had been no stats gathering, analysis or research into women in the arts ... Andrea Hull, director of policy and planning at the Australia Council, provided the funding. I think she just put it into her programme and paid for it. I don't know that it was officially a grant. It is interesting to note that the feminist in a position of power simply throws the money quietly sideways when there is no policy and therefore no programme to fit in. (221)

Eventually the research revealed the extent of the problem for women which basically was that "of any given theatre company, there is usually one male director, one male general manager and one male production manager and almost everything else in a theatre is done by women" (220). The documentation led to recommendations for official structures:

> Andrea helped the women writing the report to structure recommendations that could reach her officially, from which she could then create a policy to execute. It was called the Women and Arts Strategy. So there is this big glossy report followed by a set of recommendations to the Australia Council (which is the federal arts funding body) to follow up. One of the things the Australia Council had to do was create its own internal Women and Arts Advisory Committee to provide advice to all of the boards which fund arts, whatever art form ... <u>This kind of strategy was created so that when funding arts, they actually took account of women</u>. (emphasis mine; 221)

Frow suggests that the value of knowledge, particularly in the humanities, will involve its engagement in a constant critique of its own formation:

> I suggest by contrast, that the value of the so-called humanities, and more specifically of the disciplines of literary studies, can be defended only by taking to its radical conclusions the critique of the essentialist and foundational categories which have governed their formation. The more difficult task that this will set for us is that of elaborating theoretical categories and practices of reading which do not essentialise the domain of literature or of culture; which can account for social and cultural difference and inequality of power on a number of dimensions; which refuse to give specific aesthetic or ethical values an absolute status (and which thereby

> relativise and situate their own position); and which can develop a new understanding of the ends of textual study. (Frow 7)

The 'power over' form of institutionalised knowledge has utilised essentialist, interpretive criticism to police meaning by excluding that which is unauthorised, incorrect or voiceless, that which threatens the status quo power structures through difference and contradiction. The authoritative use of 'knowledge' in the determination of curricula within institutions has effectively homogenised the intertextual field according to dominant power interests, resulting in problems of production for women playwrights and others whose texts challenge rather than reinforce the status quo reality constructs. However, an altered critical practice that engages less in interpretation and the determination of correct meaning, and more in the critique of the construction of meanings as they relate to the production of social values, is a step that may reduce erasure and help to create a more diverse textual field that will no doubt be of benefit to writers who have been subject to long term marginalisation.

Feminist literary criticism has been working to create a less homogeneous textual field, but within the academy there is always the danger of mimicking institutionalised critical practices that reproduce authoritative positions from which to judge and create 'knowledge' that excludes difference and otherness as separate from itself. One important choice within feminist criticism is either to mimic the (hu)man discourse, with its essentialist definitions and a politics of interpretation that uses experience for the authority to judge others, or to try to transform the essentialism underlying traditional criticism's claim to 'objective' knowledge and power. Hopefully the latter can help create a different purpose to textual study using a politics of textuality that acknowledges subjectivity, relativity and complicity in the construction of meaning, such that the purpose of knowledge is not to determine truth for the sake of power but is a continual critique of the

effects of ideological textual constructs in the intertextual field of discourse. Perhaps such a politics of criticism and such a purpose to textual study can work towards developing a human discourse that is unafraid to embrace contradiction and encourage dialogue across boundaries, valuing feedback rather than erasure.

Section (D). The Quantum Anthology: An Intertextual Matrix, or, a Place to Dialogue

In this section I will suggest an alternative to the usual dramatic anthologies that consist of a collection of plays. I would like to create a textual avenue for more dialogue by developing what might be called a quantum anthology that is an 'intertextual' matrix. Here plays by women can be represented thematically within an intertextual web that juxtaposes multiple boundaries in a cross-cultural, cross-historical compilation of 'fiction', 'non-fiction', 'literary' and 'sociological' texts that includes male writers. The purpose of such a text would be to create intertextual dialogue within the borders of the anthological text itself. By juxtaposing texts in the form of plays, reviews, newspaper articles, feminist critiques, and other social texts in a bricoleur style of collage, it can be shown that textual production is a matter of reception and textually constructed social values rather than some essential 'goodness' or 'badness' located in the playtext.

For example, the representations of power patterns underlying the ideology of social 'normalcy' is disrupted by the confrontation with representations of contradiction and violence in the plays of women. The intertextual anthology can reflect this field relationship by juxtaposing extracts from texts that support such definitions of natural dominance, with texts that critique the construction of authority as a 'power over' pattern of dominance that disempowers and represses men, women and children. The contrast between dominant social definitions and representations in the plays can be highlighted by placing a newspaper article that proclaims lesbianism as a sickness juxtaposed with several plays where the lesbian characters are represented as not sick at all. A newspaper article about a woman who has thrown her baby off the roof is an example of a serious social problem and can be next to a play like De Groen's Joss Adams Show, along with a critical review that dismisses it as lightweight entertainment not worthy of serious consideration. In this way the dominant social

definitions which are part of a homogeneous, false reality constructed through critical practices, reviews, and media representation can be exposed as just that--false definitions and limiting constructs. Yet it is important to remember that these plays are actually offering different perspectives about constructions of the 'real', and it is only when they are held up against an intertextual field that they take on the signification of contradictions in a counter-discursive 'opposition'. It would be beneficial (due to the continuing widespread ignorance of dramatic work by women) to create this large, or perhaps serial, anthology of women's plays--not as the definitive collection of the best drama by women, for women and about women, but as an intertextual anthology by women for men and women that represents them in textual construct that mimics the intertextual field.

Women have often been criticised as being capable of writing only short or single issue plays. In the intertextual field, the individual author is not the only representative of collective work, and a large anthology or series can therefore represent a broader body of work discussing many issues. I would like to make some suggestions for organising plays using Bryan Turner's model of power where he classifies strategies for dominance as involving reproduction, restraint, regulation and representation; these areas could delineate a thematic organisation for the anthology of women playwrights. In the area of reproduction texts could be included that work with the construction and reproduction of gender, sexuality, motherhood, and marriage. It would be valuable to include older plays such as Glaspell's The Verge or Crothers' He and She, which represent women who feel suffocated within marriage, experience conflict with work, and in Glaspell's play, finally commit suicide. These could be juxtaposed with modern plays confronting the same issues such as Molinaro's The Abstract Wife or Lamb's The Mod Donna. This section should also include plays that deal with domestic violence and rape, as part of undermining the patriarchal notion of

protected dependents. McNeill's unpublished Half Past a Life is a savage indictment of incest, a 'father's rights', and the resulting trauma of madness. McNamara's unpublished play, The Secret Room brings domestic violence to light, De Groen's The Joss Adams Show takes a look at marriage inequalities and child abuse, while Churchill's Objections to Sex and Violence explores pornography. Boucher's The Fairies are Thirsty and Arden's Vagina Rex and the Gas Oven are good examples of texts that confront the construction of femininity, as well as female stereotypes like the madonna, wife, and whore--while exploring rape and domestic violence within these institutions. Akins' The Old Maid and Crothers' A Man's World are older plays that examine illegitimacy and the double standard, and could be interesting when compared with plays dealing with abortion, such as Lamb's But What Have You Done For Me Lately. There are not many published plays dealing with lesbianism, but Shotlander's Framework or Lyssa's Pinball both challenge the notion that homosexuals are unnatural or sick. Several plays could be included that challenge the glorification of motherhood, such as Boesing's Pimp, Bol's Treadmill, Jellico's The Sport of My Mad Mother, and Norman's 'night Mother.

In the section on dominance as restraint, plays could be included that deal with issues around the restraint of mind and body through education and religion, representing plays that challenge the system or discuss those outside the system such as prostitutes, prisoners, or witches. Fornès' play, Dr. Kheal takes on the institution of education where the teacher is always right, while Hangar's unpublished play, Ring the Changelings confronts the violence of perfectionistic conditioning for students. Plowman's Get Out of Your Cage and Cusack's Morning Sacrifice are older plays that explore the frustration of women teachers using fixed and censored curriculums. Boucher's The Fairies are Thirsty and Kennedy's A Lesson in Dead Language offer critiques of the construction of femininity within the Christian religion. Churchill's Vinegar Tom challenges the incredible power of

the church to destroy women accused as witches. Several plays that depict women who are outside of dominant moral definitions are Terry's Ex-Miss Copper Queen On a Set of Pills and Clarke's Farewell Brisbane Ladies, where both plays represent prostitutes as "women like other women" but in the social context of difficult family and economic circumstances. Shelley's Pick-Up Girl from 1943, is one of the early plays I found that explored the related problems of poverty and juvenile delinquency. Two plays I would include on women and prisons would be Norman's Getting Out and Blewett's unpublished play, The First Joanna (1947). Norman explores the problems for a woman in prison and after her release, while Blewett's play is an interesting representation of the connections between generations--depicting a modern Joanna that returned to Australia after having to sleep with a prison guard in the German army, and who is consoled by a diary of the 'first' Joanna who was a convict that had to kill the guardian who raped her.

The third section, regulation, could include plays that offer contradictions about the regulation of time and space in the form of work, property, and government. Churchill's Top Girls is an interesting look at famous women throughout history as it explores the notion of women trying to be successful within a masculinist model of work. Gray's The Torrents and Carroll's Office Interlude are older plays that explore the issue of sexual harassment, while Mueller's Killings On the Last Line is a contemporary look at women working in a nuclear reactor--dealing with harassment, union troubles, poisonous chemicals, and the lack of child-care to the point where one woman keeps her baby drugged and asleep in the women's toilet. Sowerby's Rutherford and Son and Treadwell's Machinal are older plays that examine the problems of the working class, while Howe's The Art of Dining is a modern satire about a woman trying to be independent in a business with her husband, but ends up working for him anyway. De Groen's Vocations is a good play to include because it discusses the difference between meaningful work--

as in a vocation--and the ideology of jobs. Yankowitz's play Boxes explores the many limiting 'boxes' that people have to fit into for purposes of safety and security while Terry's Home: or Future Soap extends this image into a futuristic scenario with an overpopulated society of completely controlled people. Flanagan's Can You Hear Their Voices is an older but useful dramatisation of the farmer's plight during the 30s. Two plays that discuss war and the relationship to property are Duncan's Sons of the Morning and Millay's Aria da Capo. Lyssa's The Boiling Frog is a useful examination of government and property through history, while Churchill's Light Shining in Buckinghamshire looks at the decimation imposed upon peasants during the movement by the monarchy to resume all common land. Terry's Massachusetts Trust is an interesting drama of the absurd from the 60s that confronts the construction of gender and candidates in U.S. election politics.

The fourth section, dominance by representation, could be a section that explores 'absurd' plays which challenge dominant notions of reality in language. It could include plays like Kennedy's Sun which is more of a poetic play with images of man as the sun coming apart, or any of Owen's plays which have a great deal of word play like He Wants Shih. An older example of a play that features language would be Stein's The Mother of Us All. Jardine's play Feminist Questions d'apres gynesis is also relevant, as it explores feminism and postmodern theories of representation.

Though women's plays offer representations of contradictions in dominant social definitions, they also frequently do this with an overwhelming amount of humour, to the point where I would call this a dominant characteristic. And perhaps this is a technique of the survivor. There are so many published plays by women that any organisation of their work into an anthology is a sad reduction; nonetheless, this can be seen as a valid activity to counterbalance their long term erasure. The intertextual anthology is an attempt to illustrate the methodologies of such erasure, while a

thematic organisation can expose the wide range of issues that concern women playwrights: a suggestion that an anthology or series of anthologies might take for making plays by women subjects <u>for</u> production.

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